

**RESURRECTION OF AN IMAGE: HELPING TO
ADDRESS AND HEAL THE GRIEF OF
AND ABOUT THE BLACK BEING**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
DEDICATION	ix
EPIGRAPH.....	x
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS	12
2. THE STATE OF THE ART	45
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	90
4. METHODOLOGY	111
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE	122
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION	232
APPENDIX	
A. INTRODUCTORY RESEARCH LETTER	248
B. PARTICIPANT-RELEASE AGREEMENT	251
C. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE	253
D. THE INTERVIEW GUIDE	256
E. POST-INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP PRESENTATION	266
F. A JOURNAL OF REFLECTIONS	272
G. MY FAVORITES FORM	274

H. FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS ABOUT THEIR POEMS	276
BIBLIOGRAPHY	297

ABSTRACT

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This project utilized poetry, ritual, and hospitality to develop a retreat model of love to help address and heal grief of and about the Black Being caused by the *spiritual warfare of racism*. This *image pain*, which the researcher termed *ontological grief*, was explored through individual interviews with participants that focused on the experience of *being* as an African American in a structurally racist society. Participants were engaged in a retreat day of intentional love. Qualitative, heuristic research analysis revealed positive results as participants' feedback evidenced in-depth self-reflections, emotional release, and (re)affirmation of each one's *God* image and purpose: Love.

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you had already *been through* yourselves made the circle of possibility expand for me even wider. I continue to hold you each near and dear in my heart. I thank also those who agreed to serve as context associates—Fred, Allen, Joann, Jackie, Allie, Bob, Sandra, and Marilyn. Their ever-ready feedback, suggestions, encouragement, and support literally helped to make *a contextual difference*. I pray ceaseless blessings upon your many gifts, skills, and talents.

I fondly think of and am grateful to my peer co-journeyers as we endured and climbed this mountain together—Carlton, Dossie (D.J.), Ken, Pamela, and Oscar. It truly has been because of the collective prayers and synergy of us as a group that I have been propelled and even carried forward on many occasions. I extend much love to each of you as I pray and affirm that our climbing continues! I also especially acknowledge and thank the ten courageous, caring, and compassionate people who were willing to be more than just participants in this ministry project, but rather, co-researchers who dared to peer and look deeply with me within and beyond *the Veil* created by the spiritual warfare of racism. The way you so willingly opened up your lives and your life experiences to me and, of course, by the nature of this project, to so many others, shall always be cherished and remembered with profound gratitude. May your images forever be resurrected in, with, by, and for LOVE!

And then, there has been my family. I thank my sons, Jalon and Darell, for always serving as my personal motivators and the reasons why staying with this ministry project mattered. I am grateful to my siblings, in-laws, nieces and nephews and other family members for always being there for me whenever I need them and even before. Our love

and connection as a family is always *the wind beneath my wings*. I love you. I appreciate you. I thank God for you—each and all.

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And finally, a true instance where the last is indeed first, I acknowledge the awesomeness of God, for without God's faithfulness and the new mercies God bestowed upon me daily, none of this could have been possible. Truly, this ministry project would not have manifested but for the grace and goodness of GOD! Thank You so much, blessed Lord, for the resurrecting power of Your Love!!! May I resurrect anew in it and You each and every day.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Geneva and Richard Moore, whose physical loss I still feel and whose spiritual resurrection I still celebrate!

Epigraph

A Plea for Healing

So caught up was I in the worldly mundane and the easily distractible,
Until one day, in a rare moment of stillness,
I experienced what can only be described as that which the mystics call the
ineffable.

And every since then I have been living in a renewed reality such that now,
Every time I look out and see the pervasiveness and unrelentingness
Of our suffering as a wronged and misguided people, I grieve.

Every time I hear of how our internal hurt, anger, pain, and shame
Have been inappropriately projected and then senselessly unleashed to attack and
maim yet another sister and brother, I grieve.

Every time I feel the overwhelming weight of worldly systems and structures, and
the propaganda of policies and politics all designed to seek, devour, and destroy
our very existence, our very being, I grieve.
I grieve for my self; I grieve for others; I grieve for God.

Every time, every time I know that there is no grounding, no centering, no
stillness in the midst of our unconscious busyness,
Keeping us ceaselessly seeking but not seeing anything but illusions that keep us
caught up in conflicts and confusions, I grieve.
Every time I reach out and touch the ramifications of evil symbolized,
concretized, reified and then actually internalized by us as inferior and less than,
As if these really are our heritage and birthright, I grieve.
I grieve God for all the losses we have endured as a people, the millions and
millions of hearts, minds, and souls
Forced into darkness and literally beaten into death because of centuries upon
centuries of barbaric atrocities and countless lies told by the spiritual warfare of
racism that is so heartless, that is so cold.

Yes God, I grieve. I grieve the loss of our Truth in You.
Help us to heal this vicious cycle of ontological death and destruction,
this cycle of seemingly ceaseless grief.
Help us to heal, Merciful God, for no longer do I want every time to grieve.
Help us, Oh Lord, help us to heal.
Help us, Oh Lord, help us please.

Janae Moore

INTRODUCTION

For almost as long as the researcher can remember, she has sought to comprehend why love does not exist more between us as human beings. As one who was born into the segregated social structure in the South known as Jim Crow, and as one who was directly exposed to the expression of human hurting and suffering in the form of domestic violence in her family of origin as well as in a marriage, the *why* of love's absence has continued to plague the researcher. It has especially plagued her from an ethnic/racial perspective given the long history of bane and brutal acts committed against billions of God's people based on fallacious ideology that seeks to divisively and detrimentally impose ethnic and racial differences that do not actually warrant any spiritual or ontological merit.

As an African American, the researcher—out of socially enforced necessity has been particularly attentive to, concerned about, and pained by just how *unloved* people of African ancestry have been and are in this country. The extent of the unloving treatment this group of God's creation has received—the horrors of the Middle Passage, chattel enslavement, mutilations, castrations, rapes, lynching's, disenfranchisement, segregation, discrimination—still today remain unfathomable, unconscionable, unaddressed, and, indeed in too many instances, unhealed.

What is it that keeps us away from love and from loving when love is such a desired *and* a required need for us all? What are the psychological, emotional and also spiritual dynamics and forces that operate to keep us stuck in the *muck and the mire* of

unlovingness when we were all created by God with love, in love, because of love, and for the sole purpose of love? It has been the inability to rid herself of these haunting queries and concerns that the researcher has been compelled to engage this ministry endeavor. The researcher's specific focus on the unloving treatment of African Americans in no way is intended to negate or minimize the unloving treatment meted out to any of God's creation.

The horrors that happened to the native people of this country upon America's *proclaimed founding*, still perpetually hurt, harm, and hound them today as well. The atrocities committed against the Jews before, during, and after their holocaustic experiences give credence to their decries to never forget in order to assure that such inhumane actions are never repeated. And, for any and all others who have been and continue to be treated in unloving ways—whether the results have been genocidal, homicidal, or suicidal, or considered extreme, meager, or mild—they are all egregious and categorically are a part of what the researcher considers to be and will hereafter reference as spiritual warfare. Additionally, and most significantly, all unloving acts intended for hurt, harm, destruction, and/or death, are spiritually, ethically and morally antithetical to who and how God has created, commands, and calls us *to be*: loving and loved.

The researcher notes at this juncture that for the purpose of emphasizing the monumental and divine significance of who human beings are as created in God's own image,¹ the word *be* and its derivatives are being italicized when used for ontological/existential purposes. The italicization is purposely being used as a visual means

¹Genesis 1:27.

of *speaking-to-our-spirits* to consciously remind and, hopefully, as necessary, help re-awaken us to our divine essence and purpose. Additionally, all biblical references are from the New International Version (NIV), unless otherwise noted and the terms Black and African American will be used interchangeably.

For the specific purpose of her ministry project, the researcher defined spiritual warfare as *all efforts and actions of the world forces of darkness and the spiritual forces of wickedness² to use all beings and all things possible to steal, kill, and destroy³ all that God has created as and created to be good,⁴ for the sole purpose of allowing evil to rule and reign throughout the heavens and the earth*. Spiritual warfare is the proverbial war that continues to be waged between good and evil even though the triumph and victory of good is guaranteed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This past, present and futuristic outcome, however, does not deter these wicked forces—symbolized by Satan and his cohorts—from attempting to reek havoc and evil daily in the world in efforts to hurt, harm, and destroy all that God has lovingly created.

While the realities of spiritual warfare can and do come in many guises and forms, for the purpose of this ministry effort, the researcher was most concerned with spiritual warfare as it has been and is waged against people of African ancestry, most especially through the use of *race* and, subsequently, *racism* as one of its means to seek to accomplish spiritual warfare's wicked and deadly ends. It is because of this direct

²Ephesians 6:12.

³John 10:10.

⁴Genesis 1.

intention of spiritual warfare that the researcher, for specificity and focus to her ministry research project, used the term *spiritual warfare of racism* and defined it accordingly: *the false, distorted, superficial, and wicked use of race to destroy the unification and love God intends for all humanity by waging battles between racial/ethnic groups for the ultimate purpose of spreading evil and destroying the people of God and what God has created and purposes for good.*

The researcher opted to use the terminology of spiritual warfare and the spiritual warfare of racism (and also structural racism) to purposely remind herself, the co-researchers, and others of the reality that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”⁵ Thus, no matter the position one finds him or herself in when racism is practiced as a means of spiritual warfare, all—as sisters and brothers—are victims to its ultimate ends: distortions, divisions, destruction, demise, and, ultimately, death, as the following commentary by Barndt corroborates:

Racism is an evil weed sown in the garden of humanity. It has grown wildly, entangling the healthy plants and covering the pathways, creating a great maze, a labyrinth with twists and turns that have led humanity astray. Racism has entwined and entrapped us all.⁶

The researcher, in choosing her ministry focus, was ultimately seeking to become un-entwined and un-entrapped by racism’s evil as she sought to better know and

⁵Ephesians 6:12.

⁶Joseph Barndt, *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 11.

understand the nature of her experience as an African American who, although created by and made in the image and likeness of God,⁷ found herself trying *to be* in a society that has, since its beginnings, been structurally organized by spiritual warfare (and most particularly the spiritual warfare of racism) to value and affirm the worth and image of some human beings while refuting and denigrating that of others. As a person socially and ethnically relegated to the latter category, the researcher found the systemic and pervasive refutation and defamation of her ontological existence (and that of millions of others) specifically posed by the spiritual warfare of racism to not be without significance—despite her cognizance of God as her Creator and the One in whom she lived and moved and had her *Being*.⁸

It was during the first phase of the Doctor of Ministry process when the researcher was writing her spiritual autobiography that the intense memories and emotions associated with this ontological negation surfaced or, rather resurfaced. The memories and emotions resurfaced with such strength and vigor that the researcher was compelled to explore and investigate them further for better understanding and meaning. It was upon doing so that the researcher consciously allowed herself to get in touch with and acknowledge just how incredibly sad, pained and angry she was about the *unloving treatment* she and other Blacks (and other people of color) have received in this country and throughout the Diaspora. She was incredibly sad, pained, and angry about the many losses that have resulted from this unloving treatment, treatment that has primarily resulted from the spiritual warfare of racism.

⁷Genesis 1: 27.

⁸Acts 17: 28.

The researcher, after discussing her experiences with one of her professional associates, was directed to look at the grief experiences the researcher had had in her life. Consequently, as the researcher gave conscious permission for all that had been socially buried, hidden, and silenced within her to emerge; she tapped into a plethora of grief that spanned centuries. For it was grief of and about the damning and desacralizing images projected and portrayed in society about being Black and how Blacks have subsequently been treated, as well as how Blacks have been conditioned to treat themselves and each other because of these negative images. It was grief, ultimately, of and about the Black Being and all that this existence has come to negatively symbolize and mean in and of the world. The researcher, after being with the intensity of these memories, thoughts, feelings and emotions, subsequently gave name and definition to what she was experiencing and what she knew millions of others who were denied godly recognition and treatment had experienced and were experiencing as well: *ontological grief*.

Like all other grief, ontological grief is based on a loss or losses. Ontological grief, however, is viewed by the researcher as a primary or foundational grief from which all other grief stems. She defines ontological grief as *the deep, core pain, sadness, and longing one's spirit and soul experiences as a consequence of the losses that result from not knowing, not loving, and not living the true nature and essence of one's BEING as created by and in the image of God*. Ontological grief is generated from the losses stemming from not knowing and not seeking to know how to be in loving relationship with God, self, and one's neighbors as Jesus emphasizes the two greatest commandments require and also as He identifies as the ones upon which all other commandments, or

laws, and prophets are based.⁹ Ultimately, and most detrimentally, ontological grief denotes—as a result of this triune love loss from God, self, and others—the loss of *heaven being on earth* as God intends.

Ontological grief is a spiritual/ existential state with potentially debilitating and pervasive ramifications that can be internally far-reaching and externally widespread. It is conscious as well as unconscious grief—the hurt, the pain, the sadness, and even the anger that occurs in one’s spirit and soul every time there is a failure *to be loving* and *to be loved*. When left unaddressed and unhealed, ontological grief results in self-negation in the forms of self-minimization, self-rejection, and, ultimately, self-annihilation of one’s *Being*. It is from this internal place of not knowing one’s own self as being love and being unconditionally loved by God that all acts of unlovingness are produced, perpetuated, and projected. Thus, we all suffer the consequences of any and all acts of unlovingness, just as we all stand to benefit and be blessed by our actions of love.

Phenomenologically, ontological grief can be experienced by all people and is expressed in the societal diagnosis given by Kohut, which surmises that the primary pathologies of the time are *self pathologies*, resulting from inadequately formed or poorly established selves.¹⁰ Another significant point about ontological grief is that from both a conceptual and practical viewpoint, ontological grief cannot be comprehended or appreciated unless understood within a theological and spiritual framework that takes spiritual warfare into account. In fact, the researcher contends that it is directly due to the actions of spiritual warfare that ontological grief manifests as a major problem within

⁹Matthew 22:37-40.

¹⁰Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 187-188.

one's *being* and, hence too, within society. Consequently, the state of ontological grief also denotes the loss of all the abundance and good that is to be manifested from fulfilling and actualizing the sacred and divine purposes God intends for each one's life—both individually and communally.

Ontological grief can lead to a false perception of disconnection from the liberating truth of Christ Jesus and the salvific power of God's love. As the loss experiences are internalized and, usually too, exacerbated, one is conditioned to believe, feel and see the Self—one's own *being* and/or that of others, sometimes including the *being* of God—as not being love, loved, loving, or lovable. Instead, one suffering the loss of the authentic *Self*, in a state of vulnerability and even desperation due to existential anxiety, begins to be idolatrously redefined and re-imaged in the likeness of others and other things that are not of or about God, but rather are of and about the world. So consumed can one *be* with this false image of his/her self and its destructive and devastating consequences that conscious awareness is lost of the quintessential purpose of human existence: to love God, self, and others.

While the researcher perceives ontological grief to be germane to and prevalent within the whole of society, for the purpose of her ministry project, however, the researcher focused on the significance of ontological grief based on her experiences as an African American whose ontological quest has been significantly shaped and defined by the spiritual warfare of racism. The researcher sought to further explore and discern more about the phenomenon of ontological grief through dialogue with other African Americans as they too have had to contend with the spiritual warfare of racism. The researcher's mission has been to develop a ministry model that will aide in the

transformation and healing of both the conscious and unconscious presence of the hurt, pain, and the detriment of ontological grief in African American neighborhoods and communities and, ultimately, human society at-large. The ministry project's title, *Resurrection of An Image*, is an acknowledgement that despite the centuries of unloving treatment Blacks have experienced as a people; despite the collective conscious and unconscious heart, mind, soul, body, and spiritual scarring, grief, and death that have resulted from it, the Truth of who God created this ethnic group of people *to be* remains

The metaphorical usage of *resurrection* affirms the sustaining and liberating power of this truth. Just as Martin Luther King, Jr. is noted for popularizing the saying, "truth crushed to the ground shall rise," so too shall the Truth of who African Americans are as a people *rise* as they so align themselves with who, how, and why God has created them and all other ethnic groups *to be*: again, loved and loving. *Resurrection of An Image* is also symbolic of the phoenix bird who, in Egyptian mythology, rises from the ashes five hundred years after its death. The model's name and thrust, most of all, denotes the biblical and theological affirmation and reminder that although the battle of spiritual warfare is real, victory is guaranteed in the resurrection of Christ Jesus. As loving relationships with God, Self, and others prevail, ontological grief will have no place to exist because just as "perfect love casts out fear,"¹¹ it also casts out ontological grief.

In Chapter One of the project, the underpinning for the model is more specifically outlined. The researcher establishes why love is so important to her as a means to help heal the phenomenon of ontological grief. This beginning chapter merges the experiences and learning's from the researcher's spiritual journey with the gifts and talents of poetry,

¹¹1 John 4:18.

ritual, and hospitality with which God has blessed her and calls her to utilize within her ministry context to help address and heal the grief of and about the black Being.

Chapter Two is a narrative analysis of the current literature that addresses the two primary issues of this ministry model: ontological grief and love. Because the phenomenon that the researcher has named as *ontological grief* is not yet part of the existing grief lexicon, the researcher demonstrates its existence by reliance on current grief literature to include using both fictional and non-fictional literature to document its reality.

In Chapter Three the theological, historical, and psychological tenets that determine the theoretical foundation for this model are provided. All of these various theoretical precepts and tenets merge to support the choice for a model of love to help confront and heal the ontological grief that African Americans (and others) experience as a result of the spiritual warfare of racism.

The methodological design used to engage with and gather data from the participants during the field experience is the heart of Chapter Four. The researcher identifies the methods, techniques, and instruments that were used with the participants as well as why. The benefits of using the qualitative methodologies of heuristic and action research are also discussed.

The details of what happened during the implementation of the model are contained in Chapter Five. The results of the data collected from the methods used are analyzed and expanded upon. The researcher explicates these findings for meaning and significance to the overall research efforts and the ultimate purpose of the ministry project.

The final chapter, Chapter Six, is a summation of the reflections the researcher had during the field experience. The researcher shares lessons learned, limitations identified, as well as recommendations for future research to expound and build upon the model she has put forward in a continued commitment to help address and heal, through the transformative power of love, the grief of and about the psuedo-image of the Black Being so that the true image, as so created by and sustained in God, can be resurrected.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BIRTHING OF A MINISTRY: IN THE BEGINNING

Within the Veil was [s]he born, said I; and there within shall [s]he live,—a Negro and a Negro's [daughter]. Holding in that little head—ah bitterly!—the unbowed pride of a hunted race, clinging with that tiny dimpled hand—ah, wearily!—to a hope not hopeless but unhopeful, and seeing with those bright wondering eyes that peer into my soul a land whose freedom is to us a mockery and whose liberty a lie.¹

W.E.B. DuBois

The year was 1958. The month and day were March 29th. The social, political, educational and economic atmosphere was color coded, contentious and sweltering with the energies that were helping to propel the Civil Rights Movement throughout the South as well as in areas in the North. The location was a small, rural southern town in North Carolina nostalgically named Magnolia—a place that, although with a population, then as well as now, of less than 1000 (932 according to the 2000 census), nonetheless mirrored the mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors of the dominant culture that prevailed throughout the nation. These were mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors spurred by the spiritual warfare of racism, which included the political sanctioning and legal reinforcement of calcified racist dispositions that created and governed public and private institutions, policies, and laws at local, state, and federal levels. Indeed, Andrew Sung Park's idyllic vision for "a global wholeness in which all of God's creations live in respect, harmony, and

¹W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1st ed. 1903, 1989), 147.

love, rejoicing in one another's company"² had not been sown in the minds and hearts of the majority of the town's inhabitants, much less watered and nurtured as a possibility.

The antithesis of this loving vision of global wholeness not only determined the context of the researcher's birth, but has included over 500 years of unrelenting efforts by the spiritual warfare of racism to ontologically recreate the African as, not only a *being* not "created in the image and in the likeness of God,"³ but also as a *being* it attempts to re-classify anthropologically and prototypically as non-human—or at least as sub-human. Thus, in direct opposition to this vision, a multitude of historical acts and traditional actions served to define and dictate the pomp and circumstances of the researcher's birth as a person of African ancestry born in America: in the back room of a public clinic literally marked *for Coloreds*. The clinic was located in Rose Hill, a city approximately five miles away from Magnolia since the latter did not have either a clinic or a hospital.

It was in this biblically unsound, theologically unethical, and existentially amoral spirit or *Zeitgeist* that the researcher was born. It was in this historically racialized context that the researcher, like too many million others like her, began her journey in the world, as DuBois aptly described, *within the Veil*.⁴ It has been a *Veil* continuously woven by the unloving actions inherent in the *spiritual* warfare of racism as the attempt, by every means possible, has been put forward to refute the divinity and sacredness, i.e., the *imago Dei*, of African Americans, and to deny all the rights thereof they have as heirs to God's kingdom, glory, and goodness—life, liberty, and the *inheritance* of eternal life as

²Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 170.

³Genesis 1:26-27.

⁴DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 147.

assured through a salvific relationship with Jesus Christ and the opportunity “to have life and to have it more abundantly.”⁵ It has been a *Veil* cast to obscure God as the Creator and Supreme Being and Omnipotent Power of the entire universe, inclusive of and over all humankind and, instead, has sought to permanently place the European prototype in a pseudo-superior position that only God can truly occupy and fulfill.

Because of this tragic and ungodly American legacy, the researcher was the fifth of six of her parents’ eight children born in the dehumanizing style and fashion of Jim Crow. The notoriously inferior and intentionally devaluing space relegated for her birth and others of African ancestry symbolizes the ongoing massive failure of the nation to live, not only in accordance with its own preamble, constitutional creed, as well as its declaration of the supposedly self-evident truths that “all men [and women] are created equal” and “that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights” among which are “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,”⁶ but far more significantly, the failure to live according to this same Creator’s intent for humanity. Unfortunately, in the culture and context in which the researcher was born, love, as a societal force, was not dominant at her birth. While the beloved community remained an ideal for some, it was far from a reality—not only in North Carolina and the Jim Crow clinic where her parents were forced to give birth to her, but throughout the entire nation.

Given the multi-dynamics that have historically impinged upon the totality of the daily lives of people of African ancestry, it was indeed interesting for the researcher to reflect on and write about her life from a position of hindsight. The additional knowledge,

⁵John 10:10.

⁶ Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States 1492- Present*, rev. and updated ed. (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1995), 71.

understanding, and, prayerfully, maturity she acquired over the course of almost a half century resulted in the possibility of an in-depth analysis of her experiences, as well as the inclusion of details and dynamics that were previously unknown and/or not considered. For example, the researcher used to literally believe in the Constitution and that there was a genuine effort towards its fulfillment. While she realized racism existed, she still believed in the ideals espoused in the Constitution and in the inherent goodness of humanity. The researcher did not learn until much later in life, for it definitely was not taught in school, that the so-identified founding fathers never intended the Constitution to provide freedom, rights, or powers to anyone other than those they deemed qualified for and deserving of them, as the following comment by Zinn clearly establishes:

To many Americans over the years, the Constitution drawn up in 1787 has seemed a work of genius put together by wise, humane men who created a legal framework for democracy and equality.... Another view of the Constitution was put forward early in the twentieth century by the historian Charles Beard.... In short, Beard said, the rich must, in their own interest, either control the government directly or control the laws by which government operates. Beard applied this general idea to the Constitution, by studying the economic backgrounds and political ideas of the fifty-five men, who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 to draw up the Constitution. He found that a majority of them were lawyers by profession, that most of them were men of wealth, in land, slaves, manufacturing, or shipping, that half of them had money loaned out at interest, and that forty of the fifty-five held government bonds, according to the records of the Treasury Department. Thus, Beard found that most of the makers of the Constitution had some direct economic interest in establishing a strong federal government.... Four groups, Beard noted, were not represented....: slaves, indentured servants, women, [and] men without property. And so the Constitution did not reflect the interests of those groups.⁷

The origin of African Americans in this country began with their interests not even being considered, much less reflected or represented. Historically, African

⁷Ibid., 89-90.

Americans have had to engage warfare on all fronts in order simply to try *to be*—spiritually, physically, psychically, emotionally, culturally, socially, politically, economically, educationally, medically, and environmentally. From one generation to the next, the status and stigma of being perceived and treated as an inferior *being* within society was passed on to this researcher from the moment of her conception. Given that the racist social system assured that her parents were not able to receive equal or quality health care, her coming into existence as a *being* who happened to be Black, was already made different from the many millions who were given birth based on their *being* White. It was in this context that the researcher had her humble, though socially and racially skewed, spiritual beginnings.

Growing and Developing

As the researcher reflected on her spiritual beginnings, one thing she recalled most about herself as a young child was that she deeply loved people, just as she deeply loved life. Her heart was open to and connected with others. When someone was visibly happy, she was happy because the other person was happy. When someone was hurt or in pain, the researcher felt and experienced the hurt and pain as well. She believed, although she now knows it was innocently and naively, that people really had good intentions to love and that one would not just cruelly inflict harm to another. She soon learned, however, that this was indeed not the actual story of fallen humanity.

The researcher also recalls that she was a very sensitive child. As the saying goes, she wore her emotions on her sleeve. If someone said or did something to her that was cruel or with a motivation or clear intention to hurt her, the researcher was literally

devastated. As one who, at the time, could not conceive of inflicting intentional hurt or harm on others, the researcher could not understand why someone would seek to do anything to hurt or harm her, or others. The researcher, in her youthful innocence and, perhaps too, ignorance, also did not know how to properly process intentional human cruelty because her heart and mind were genuinely filled with love. Usually, in addition to being internally wounded, she was left wondering what was it that she had done to make the person respond to or treat her the way he or she did and what could she do to repair the relationship to make sure it did not reoccur. Having and maintaining peace and a loving connection with others were very important values for the researcher in her early formative years of life.

Again, in reflection, the researcher was better able to understand why the views she held about people and life changed. The change occurred incrementally and also, in the majority, unconsciously as the researcher witnessed and experienced the unfolding of what she now knows as the impact of historical and perpetual oppression. The oppression she experienced as a youngster was based mostly on characteristics of race, but also gender and income. It was oppression, the researcher came to realize, spearheaded by spiritually unenlightened and unloving people that produced a socially hostile environment that threatened one's well being, including her own.

In ways and for reasons the researcher could not initially comprehend or fathom, the ramifications of racial oppression had taken an inestimable toll on her ontologically as it had done and is still doing to millions of others. The researcher found she was unable to psychically or emotionally manage the dissonance between the love she felt and desired inside with the outwardly unloving actualities surrounding her. Growing up in a

household where her father physically, verbally, and emotionally abused her mother was absolutely crushing to the researcher's psyche and sense of being and her ability to relate in the world. As a child, she did not understand the multiple dynamics of domestic violence, and worse yet, she did not have the power to stop it, as fervently as she desired to. She did not know what her father needed in order to be more loving, happy, caring, and fun; she just knew she wanted him to be. She did not know or understand what made him drink alcohol, converting him from a mild-mannered and basically quiet person into someone boisterous, angry, and crazed; she just knew she wanted him to stop.

And then there was the researcher's mother, the person she loved most in the world; a woman who, by nature and spirit, was gentle and kind and giving and beautiful; a woman who was valedictorian of her class, yet was confined by a system that did not value her intelligence or reward her with opportunities to actualize her potential or to fulfill her purpose. Instead, she was straddled with a mistreated, pained, grieved and wounded husband who took his limited sense of self out on her, as she, with the responsibility of eight children falling primarily upon her, also had to psychologically and emotionally confront the same racist world that significantly contributed to his feeling and being the way he was. Terminology did not exist—at least not for the researcher—that adequately allowed her to express how absolutely horrific it was to helplessly witness the many years her father drank and abused her mother as well as the many years her mother believed she had no other choice but to keep taking it. Her mother's decision no doubt rested upon many variables, including the idea that leaving what she knew, although very bad, to have to face a mean, cruel and racist system as a Black woman with eight children, did not seem much better and, in many ways, was

actually worse. At least there were periods of reprieve from the drinking and fighting and, perhaps as her mother undoubtedly thought, the heart of the researcher's father would change before she could expect the many hearts of those who were viciously mean, even pathological and fanatical in their racism, to do so.

The researcher recalls how *heavy* the atmosphere of home was. The engagement of her ministry project and the intensity of the feelings and emotions that resurfaced for her during the process enabled her to name and identify this heaviness as ontological grief. Ontological grief occupied a prominent space in the home of the researcher and her family. Its presence was so pervasive and mammoth, it crowded out much of the love, joy, laughter, fun, and abundant living they were meant to have.

So gripping and all encompassing were the ramifications of the spiritual warfare of racism on their lives and livelihood, it was easy for ontological grief to take up permanent residence and yield the influence it did over them. This was particularly true since, at the time, neither the researcher nor her family knew what ontological grief was, or how to deal with it healthily. Besides, there were too many socially unloving customs and norms, most of which were held in place by the spiritual warfare of racism in the accompaniment of other *isms* (genderism, classism, elitism, etc.), that conditioned the family to keep engaging in actions that normalized the abnormalities. So rather than talking about and dealing directly with the realities that were happening within their household, as well as within them, the family, in the majority, was silenced and locked into the ever infamous *vicious cycle* of internalizing the hurt and pain, the guilt and shame, the uncertainty and confusion. They did so until the intensity of these emotions

were projected out in ways that only exacerbated, rather than eradicated, their grief and suffering.

Since the original sin act was committed by humans against God, it has been, without a doubt, the widespread and pervasive impact of centuries of human beings denying their own spiritual essence and the essence of others, that the spiritual warfare of racism has been able to effectively thrive. So effective has the spiritual warfare of racism been, its impact has contributed to the researcher's change from being openly loving and caring about and connected to people and life to someone who learned, through social conditioning, to be guarded, mistrusting, and, too often, closed and disconnected. The researcher learned at a very early age and as a matter of survival to pay attention to her surrounding environment. A discerning hyper-vigilance was created within her that remains today.

The continuous exposure to unloving situations and conditions caused the researcher to believe that the primary purpose for her existence—to love—was actually hazardous to her health and well-being. The displaced internalized inferiority that played out in her family as a result of the negative messages and treatment they received because of the socially constructed rhetoric and images attributed to *blackness*, rendered unto the researcher an unmistakable message: to love, at least to love as a Black person, was to be in pain. And since she did not want to be in pain, at least not the kind she found herself frequently feeling, her irrational, worldly mind convinced her that the answer was to stop loving at least as much as she did and as openly as she did. The researcher now realizes that the less she let herself openly feel and express love for others, the more it resulted in her loving herself less, as well. While most of these actions occurred without

much forethought or in a relatively unconscious state, the realities nonetheless evidenced love's reciprocal, connective and relational nature: the only way to receive and have love is to share and give love.

During the challenge of her early formative to teenage years, the researcher's relationship with God was more conceptual than literal. The researcher was not astute or mature enough to make a conscious connection, or to see and understand the disconnection between the way society was structurally organized and how God had actually created and intended creation to be. As children, she and her siblings went to Sunday school and church, usually with the researcher's mother since her father did not attend church, except on extremely rare occasions.

The researcher remembers enjoying going to church. In addition to her spirit connecting with it as a sacred place to commune with, worship and praise God, church was also a place that was safe. In church the researcher did not have to worry about fussing and fighting or have to deal directly with white people who practiced the spiritual warfare of racism—the exception perhaps being the impact the portrait of a White Jesus unconsciously had on her and others then. Also, church was where the researcher saw other family members and friends outside of school.

Most in attendance were related to each other in some way and many of the researcher's paternal relatives helped in the founding and building of the church. At some point during her middle school years, the researcher joined her family church, Magnolia First Baptist.

She cannot say that she felt called to do so; it just felt like the right thing to do at that time. Another point of significance regarding the researcher's knowledge of and belief

in God during her childhood included the common youthful teaching she received about God as an all-powerful being, one who had *the whole world in His hands*. And since this was a major way she perceived God at that time, the researcher used to pray and ask God to remove her father from their household. The researcher believed her survival and the survival of her mother and siblings depended on her father being gone—dead or alive. She did not, of course, as a young and naïve child, know or understand the invisible and even disguised historical winds of racial hatred blown by others in society as being major contributors to the storms of life her family was constantly having to weather. She later realized, again from hindsight, just how intentionally directed those hate-filled winds were.

They destroyed any concept her father might have had of himself as a confident, capable and deserving man and of her family knowing, identifying, experiencing, and expressing themselves as anything other than inferior beings who functioned *dysfunctionally*. The sentiments expressed by a Mississippian in 1890 after Mississippi purposely revised its constitution in order to completely disenfranchise Blacks in their state, no doubt captures the true intent of all racist ideology and practices: “The policy of crushing out the [person]hood of the Negro citizens is to be carried on to success.”⁸ It was overtly then, and more covertly today, a policy as well as a practice that many, if not all, other states adopted, in some form or manner, and assiduously carried out against Blacks for centuries.

The researcher thanked God for blessing her to have a more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the multiple dynamics and interactions that accounted for her life’s journey as well as the journey of others, particularly those of her parents. Consequently,

⁸Clayborne Carson, Consultant, *Civil Rights Chronicle: The African-American Struggle for Freedom* (Lincoln, IL: Legacy Publishing, 2003), 37.

she often thought about what it must have been like for her father who, although biologically a man with manly responsibilities (a wife and eight children), had to deal daily with the daunting realities of an almost entirely white dominated and white operated social system that treated him like a boy, wanted him to feel and act like a boy, but yet cruelly and unjustly criticized and ridiculed him for not being a man. Ah!—the ontological and existential anguish created by such an irrational and dehumanizing system as racism that no *being* should ever have to endure and yet millions upon millions, like my father and mother, did and, ever so unfortunately, millions still do!

It was only because of God's gracious granting of wisdom in her mind and healing in her heart that the researcher no longer has issues with her father as an individual. Rather, she began to contend with issues within the worldly system in which she lived that was mass producing wounded, broken, hurt, angry, and even voiceless and silenced people, such as grieving people like my father and mother, because of society's refusal to validate and affirm the Truth of whom all are as God created and sacred beings. Consequently, the researcher's passion and commitment grew to help eradicate systemically racist and oppressive ideologies and practices, public institutions and public policies included, that helped to create persons and personalities like her father, mother and others who were denied opportunities to actualize the best of themselves.

As Rev. Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor justifiably posed in his own faith memoir, "Who can measure the extent to which oppression affects cognitive ability? Who knows the extent which racism affects one's self-concept and, thus, performance?"⁹ And then, there is again the wisdom and insight of DuBois, "One ever feels his twoness,—an

⁹Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African-American Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995), 183.

American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”¹⁰

Finding Home Away From Home

A person can run for years but sooner or later [s]he has to take a stand in the place which, for better or worse, [s]he calls home, to do what [s]he can to change things there.¹¹

Paule Marshall

After the researcher graduated from high school, she was very ready to leave home. Her only reluctance, however, was leaving her mother. She was fearful of what might happen to her mother in her absence given her father’s proneness to drink and abuse her. The researcher realized as she re-engaged this part of her life just how deep the fear was within her, as well as how much anxiety this unknown possibility provoked. In typical psychoanalytic, escapist fashion, the researcher closed down emotionally to mask the fears she had about her parents and other unconscious ontological and existential anxieties. Paralleling the culture in which she lived, she effectively, although detrimentally, used a variety of defense mechanisms that allowed her to irrationally compartmentalize herself into a rational, individualized *being*. It was in this state that she relied far more on her cognitive skills and abilities than her emotions because, after all, she had already conditionally learned at a young age that it hurt too much to feel—particularly as a Black person targeted by the spiritual warfare of racism.

¹⁰DuBois, *The Soul of Black Folk*, 3.

¹¹Ronald McKnight, ed., *African American Wisdom* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2000), 7.

It was the absence of emotional connection to herself, others, and, yes, to God as well, that resulted in the researcher getting involved in situations and relationships that were not necessarily for or about her highest good. Again, in hindsight, the researcher realized that she was also acting out her fears, anxieties, anger, pain, confusions, uncertainties, and grief in very spiritually immature ways. The researcher frighteningly began to resemble those persons who employed the defense of isolating and repressing their emotions to the extreme point described by Brenner as “usually manag[ing] to keep from feeling too much emotion of any sort.”¹²

While the researcher continued to attend church in college and graduate school, she maintained more of a conceptual, abstract, and distant relationship with God rather than one that was close, intimate, and personal. She was very much caught up into the social mores of consumerism and narcissism; almost gone at that time were the deep yearnings of the little girl who only wanted love, life, and laughter for everyone, including herself. Even if the researcher thought about such desires, she did not allow herself to linger long enough with the thought to feel it beyond a surface consideration. It would take graduation from graduate school, a marriage that shockingly mirrored her parents, and the demands of parenthood, most of which was as a single parent, for a deepening of the researcher’s spiritual life to occur and for her feelings and emotions to resurface.

¹²Charles Brenner. *An Elementary Textbook of Psychoanalysis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), 98.

Searching and Seeking for God

The researcher married on June 2, 1982 and graduated from graduate school with a masters in clinical social work, fifteen days later. Her then new and now ex-husband departed to return to Korea for military duty on July 16, 1982 and did not return to the states until January 1983. The researcher gave birth to their first of two sons on September 20, 1982. Needless to say, 1982 was a year of many changes and challenges. So much happened that was new and different in her life, including being back at home with her parents, that the researcher did not recognize that she was depressed, lonely, over-whelmed and grieved. Many of these feelings and emotions were not expressed or acknowledged because she had become adept at hiding within the Veil. Besides, the researcher had a son who needed and depended on her for survival—no matter all the inner workings or non-workings of her heart, mind and soul. Therefore, the researcher did not believe, even unconsciously, that she could allow the inferno of emotions within her to surface or they would have consumed her beyond her ability to care for her son and her capacity to keep on keeping on.

When the researcher's husband returned from Korea, he was stationed at Fort Belvoir, Virginia where she joined him there with their five-month old son. Despite all the researcher's readiness for a new family life, it took less than one week of them being together for her to learn that she could neither depend on nor trust her husband. This painful reality, paradoxically, was a pivotal point in her consciously and intentionally establishing a closer, more personal and intimate relationship with the Lord. Not willing to return home, the researcher was determined to make *her family* work. By being away from her biological and extended family—with no one else to turn to or trust—the

researcher was clearly able to see, and really feel too, that she needed God in her life in a way she never allowed herself to realize before.

Shortly after being in the marriage, the researcher contended with the same problem her mother had: a husband who was physically abusive. She could not believe it! She thought she had *rationaly* figured out how *not* to marry a man like her father. After all, the researcher's husband was very different from her father, at least outwardly. But there she was, with all her hopes and dreams of love and marriage and family-life shattered by domestic violence. From a surreal distance, the researcher witnessed herself become someone, or perhaps, more accurately, some *thing* she vowed never to become: a woman mentally, emotionally, and physically trapped like her mother.

It took approximately five years before the researcher was able to break what felt like a generational family curse. Believing in the sanctity and covenant of marriage, it took serious counseling and support from others before the researcher accepted that God did not want her to be in an abusive relationship, even if it was by marriage. Finally, she developed the consciousness and courage to leave her husband. The separation and eventual divorce came after a second child was born and, thus, the researcher found herself, at the age of 25, in the role of a single parent with two sons, ages five and one.

Because her husband continued to harass her once she left the marriage, the researcher was spiritually led to leave North Carolina and return to Northern Virginia, an area she had grown to like and to which she desired to relocate. God immediately blessed her with employment in Washington, D.C. with a nonprofit organization that provided medical and social services to people at shelters who were homeless. The researcher was

also able to obtain housing for her and her two sons as God made yet another much needed transition possible.

The many hardships and challenges the researcher endured as a single parent brought her even closer to that place within where God said, “Be still and know that I am God.”¹³ As the researcher dealt with her new and unanticipated marital status along with the scars of domestic violence, divorce, and the ravages of racism, God remained a steady and constant source and resource in her life. The researcher had finally come to know God much more personally as a tested, tried, and true friend. As a single parent, she was always aware of the statistics indicating high poverty rates for female-headed households and especially for those of her ethnic background. She marveled as she looked back over her life, able to see just how present God was to her and her children as so many ways were made from what she had considered to be *no way* and *no how*.

The researcher contended from her personal relationship with God that the most devastating and painful reality about the viciousness of the spiritual warfare of racism and its subsequent oppressions is that it veils the Truth of the love relationship God yearns to have with all His people, especially those oppressed and scorned. In the pathology that it breeds, the spiritual warfare of racism deceptively uses race to disconnect those whom it targets from knowing and being in a love relationship with God. There is no consequence of the legacy and present reality of the imperialism, enslavement, domination, exploitation, and oppression inherent in the spiritual warfare of

¹³Psalm 46:10 .

son, immediately wished he was lighter, just as she, in this same state of racialized ignorance, was glad to see that her younger son at birth was lighter. The fact that the researcher's focus was on skin color rather than on the instinctive need as a mother to just hold, cherish and love her child—inclusive of all physical characteristics—is a testament to how distorting and debilitating the spiritual warfare of racism really is. As illogical and pathetically sad this reality was, the researcher, by the age of twenty-four (and even younger), had been, as Malcolm X would say, *bamboozled* by the ceaseless and fanatical lies and distortions put forward by the spiritual warfare of racism; lies and distortions that sought and seek to deny Black divinity and value.

What a painful reality and inestimable loss the first parent/child meeting was for the researcher and the so many millions of others who undoubtedly harbored these same or similar thoughts and feelings. Can you imagine a White parent wishing or wanting her or his child to be darker or not white? This story, at its core, is indicative of how destructive and devastating the onslaughts of the spiritual warfare of racism have been against the image and very *beings* of African American people. The story also depicts, most egregiously and painfully, what ontological grief can look, sound, feel, and even taste like as it is caused by the spiritual warfare of racism.

As evidence of the fact that the spiritual warfare of racism's pathologies and losses get cycled and passed on generationally if not healed, the researcher had to deal with the pain and guilt of hearing her elder son, by the age of six, announce to her one day that he *did not want to be Black*. He obviously had internalized the messages and treatment he received from home and the larger society—school, the media, public

institutions—that he was less validated, affirmed, accepted, and loved because of his color. As psychologist Na'im Akbar states:

People become what they are taught about themselves. Knowledge of oneself is the fundamental key to obtaining personal and group [and family] power. In order to deny people their human rights and power, the first step is to deny them knowledge of who they are and to fill this void with either wrong or negative information.¹⁴

The researcher's son's comment and obvious pain served as a wake-up call to her, helping her to realize that as his parent, she was the one primarily responsible for protecting, honoring, and teaching him Truth—that he was and always would be a child of God, a *Being* created in the image and likeness of God and gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous, just as he was. Consequently, the researcher thereafter enrolled him and her other son in an African-centered school that helped to validate and affirm them in every aspect of their *Being*. The researcher also put forth an unyielding effort to heal the spiritual, psychological, and emotional disease within herself caused by the spiritual warfare of racism so that she could also know and *be* her own truth as she helped her children *to be* so as well.

The orientation to and immersion in an educational, social, and cultural environment that acknowledged and celebrated the African heritage and its people made a major difference in the lives of the researcher and her children. It was an environment where *being Black* was celebrated, not condemned; loved, not hated; accepted, not rejected. Rather than the social stigma of shame too often projected on to *being Black*, the researcher and her children learned together to have pride about themselves and who God has created them *to be*.

¹⁴Na'im Akbar, *The Community of Self*, rev. ed. (Tallahassee, FL: Mind Productions & Associates, Inc., 1996), 25.

As the researcher wrote this over twenty-six years since the birth of her elder son, the pain of the former experience was still felt. And while today she better understands the perpetual and pervasive dynamics that caused her own inner racial disease, her soul still cried out in grief because she knows there are many more still being made to feel and wish they were not who and how God has made them *to be* in His own image and likeness.¹⁵ The researcher knew there was and still is great work and much healing to be done as well as many images to be resurrected in our villages!

A Worldly Awakening

It was the researcher's employment with a Washington, D.C. based homeless program that opened her eyes more widely to the politicization of poverty and oppression. As a social worker working with families who had become homeless, the researcher felt as if the structures, policies and practices in society were mass-producing many of the conditions people found themselves in with no real efforts in place to prevent or eradicate them. This experience was yet another serious and intense period of disillusionment for the researcher. She had entered the work world, and the human services arena particularly, out of a genuine desire to assist others involved at the federal, state and local levels to make "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" more of a reality for the many, not just the few. Although not as visibly as she did when she was younger, the researcher still cared about and for people, especially those who were being psychologically, socially, emotionally, educationally, economically and politically harmed by social injustices and inequalities.

¹⁵Genesis 1.

The dismantling of yet another belief system and ideal the researcher harbored occurred during the same year she accepted a part-time director position for a start-up project to provide HIV/AIDS education to the staff and residents of the more than sixty homeless shelters that were in existence at the time in the District of Columbia. The actual monies allocated for this project, given the enormity of the need, was a clear statement that there was no genuine investment from the city or the government to meet the needs of those who were part of the stigmatized and marginalized and too, at that time the ostracized. Toward the project's end, the researcher was spiritually and emotionally exhausted as she was forced, yet again, to deal with the harsh and painful realities of the injustices and inequalities inherent in society all because these dynamics are inherent within humanity itself.

The researcher was disillusioned and disheartened by what she saw and experienced while working in the District, and worse yet, it was a period she felt God to be very remote and silent. These experiences coupled with her personal challenges of living in a racist society as an African American woman who struggled to make ends meet as a divorced, single parent of two young African American boys was more than enough to account for the great spiritual angst and anxiety that befell the researcher at that time in her life.

Categorically, the researcher had, at this juncture, entered the fourth stage of Fowler's faith model, the stage he calls Individuative-Reflective. It is during this phase that one "constructs a perspective genuinely aware of social systems and institutions,"¹⁶ and clearly the traditionally entrenched and mechanized systems and institutions at work

¹⁶James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1981), 179.

in D.C. assured the researcher's awakening, irrespective of how painful and wrenching the process was. Additionally, Fowler says about this stage:

For a genuine move to Stage 4 to occur there must be an interruption of reliance on external sources of authority. The 'tyranny of the they'—or the potential for it—must be undermined. In addition to the kind of critical reflection on one's previous assumptive or tacit system of values...there must be ... a relocation of authority within the self.... The two essential features of the emergence of Stage 4, then, are the critical distancing from one's previous assumptive value system and the emergence of the executive ego. When and as these occur a person is forming a new identity, which he or she expresses and actualizes by the choice of personal and group affiliations and the shaping of a 'lifestyle.'¹⁷

The researcher's deep-seated frustrations, pain and feelings of hypocrisy at the time—she, as a social worker, was part of a system that she no longer believed in or wanted to support or to be viewed as a part of—led her to seminary at Wesley Theological in Washington, D.C. The culmination of all the researcher's experiences at this point created within her such deep spiritual agony, the researcher was motivated to pursue a different belief and value system as well as lifestyle.

During the course of this spiritual developmental period, the researcher also pursued the questions inherent in theodicy. She sought to learn more about God and how God's power and authority worked, especially on behalf of the downtrodden and broken. The researcher also sought to obtain a different understanding and, perhaps too, different expectations of the human services system she was clearly a part of no matter how much she yearned not to be. The researcher searched to find something spiritually tangible she could hold onto and believe in in order to return to, not just the world of work, but to believe in people, society, and also God again. She needed to know as Cone had queried

¹⁷Ibid., 179.

in *God of the Oppressed*, “What has the gospel to do with the oppressed of the land and their struggle for liberation?”¹⁸ She needed the movement of God in her life in a real and serious way in order to *be set free* because she was indeed a captive mentally and emotionally to what she was seeing and experiencing both in and *of the world*.

The researcher attended Wesley for three semesters before she felt God had provided her with what she went for and needed: a better understanding of (1) the role of evil in the world; (2) who and how God acts on and intervenes in the world and the affairs of humanity, especially on behalf of the poor, oppressed and downtrodden; and, (3) the role and purpose the researcher had to fulfill and how she would manage to fulfill it in an unjust and oppressive society where the spiritual warfare of racism seemed to rule and reign so rampantly.

The researcher’s first class was taught by a professor who self-identified as an atheist. Many students were advised by other students as well as faculty to avoid taking his classes. He was shunned, whispered, and talked about by students and faculty alike, especially by those who self-identified as Christians. The researcher was grateful that no one delivered such disparaging messages to her prior to her having the blessed experience of this professor’s tutelage as well as the opportunity to encounter and engage his spirit.

This particular professor was a man of great depth. Intellectually, he was absolutely brilliant. Biblically, he was adept and astute. He was open and honest with students whom he taught about his own faith stance (or non-faith as some might contend) while maintaining appropriate professor-student boundaries. Without proselytizing, he challenged students to know the foundation upon which their faith beliefs rested, not

¹⁸James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1975), 9.

just because of things told and passed down from others, but rather because of being convicted and committed enough to live them daily. The researcher learned and understood that this professor, as an African American who was born and reared in the South during the heyday of Jim Crow, witnessed firsthand so-called *Christians* beat, disrespect, and even kill by lynching, members of his family and others in his community. Consequently and unfortunately, he could not fathom belief in or worship of a “God” that these same *Christians* claimed as their own. Also, unfortunately, the kind of spirit and treatment he experienced from many *Christians* at seminary was not very different either. The researcher felt herself, once again, connecting deeply with someone else’s pain as a result of being treated unlovingly because of ignorance, fear, and discrimination.

While the researcher dared not voice an opinion about what the eternal fate is of one who professes to be an atheist, she knew, however, beyond a shadow of doubt, that her own spirituality and knowing of God and how God expects humanity *to be* expanded tremendously because of this professor. In fact, the queries that the researcher had were mostly answered by this professor’s *way of being* during her time at Wesley. The researcher knew that through him, God showed her that *claiming to be a Christian* is not measured by words or self-proclamations; it is measured by actions—actions that ultimately come forth from who and how one is in spirit and in truth based, first and foremost, upon a foundation of love whereby all else is determined.

This particular professor remained in memory and in heart a spiritual mentor to this researcher. Although he was deeply in pain as an atheist at a theological seminary and suffered many losses—professional comradeship, value and respect for his skills as

a teacher, understanding and compassion—he never lost his capacity to love teaching and to love us as students. The researcher knew no better way to have a true experience of God than through an exchange with another or other human beings where love is clearly present, no matter the faith one proclaims or disclaims. The researcher knew that after experiencing this professor's love as a proclaimed atheist, paradoxically, her own faith as a Christian was renewed and she was spiritually ready to re-enter the world again better equipped internally to handle what awaited her outwardly. It was the deep passion and love that this professor exhibited, despite how unjustly he was treated, that inspired the researcher to open herself more fully again to love. The researcher, being more spiritually mature, did so with much more wisdom and discernment as her many deepening experiences taught her.

For a Time Such as This

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance ... will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?¹⁹

There is one clear message the researcher received from God during her Individuative-Reflective stage, especially while in attendance at Wesley Theological Seminary: God does not create the evil that exists in the world, rather, it is men and women of free will who do. Just as men and women freely exercise their will to create evil and harm, the will can also be used freely to create love and good. The researcher learned that God can only work through her (and others) to make the world a better place as she availed herself to be used by God for this purpose. The researcher knew that she

¹⁹Esther 4:14.

was being called by God to be, as Gandhi posed, responsible for the changes she wanted to see in the world.

The most significant experience the researcher had during this phase of her life was the death of her beloved mother. On July 6, 1996, the researcher's mother, at the age of sixty-five, was diagnosed with lung cancer. The researcher was with her when she was told and for the researcher it was an unbelievable diagnosis for many reasons. Her mother was a non-smoker and a non-drinker. It was unbelievable because heart disease ran in the family, both maternally and paternally, not cancer. It was unbelievable because her mother's life, in the researcher's estimation, had already been so hard. It was unbelievable because she was the researcher's mother. The researcher discovered cancer, however, to also be an emotionally created disease due to hardship, mistreatment, and stress. Given the fact that her mother had been on an emotional and stressful roller coaster for the majority of her life, to include from the beginning of her own birth *within the Veil* cast by the spiritual warfare of racism, her cancer diagnosis was, unfortunately, believable.

The researcher's mother had a persistent cough for at least two, if not three, years prior to her receiving a correct diagnosis. Despite going to the doctor for this and other symptoms, she was misdiagnosed as well as mistreated. Although the researcher's family was told that surgery would be able to remove the cancer, once surgery was performed, a different prognosis was given: it had spread too far for complete removal. After chemotherapy and radiation and, towards, the end, even holistic treatments, the researcher's mother made her transition on April 15, 1999 at the age of sixty-eight. Her illness did linger and she suffered with a lot of physical pain. Ironically, it was at the height of her most intense suffering that the researcher's mother's faith became visibly

stronger. At one point in her receipt of morphine to help manage her pain, the hospice nurse commented that she had received enough morphine to knock out a horse. But she was not knocked out. She had her heart and mind stayed on the Lord as she continued to praise God through her pain and the medication, to include towards her last days when she came in and out of a semi-coma state singing praises unto God's name.

As painful as her mother's transition was in the researcher's life, witnessing her mother's faith at a time when she could so easily have been angry at and even rejecting of God helped the researcher to strengthen and deepen her own faith. Sometimes when the researcher felt her faith begin to wane, she went back in memory to her mother singing praises to God in a highly medicated state. She went back to how her mother, through a personal and active relationship with God, finally came to a place of freedom and peace within herself while still living in a cruel and racist society and also married to the researcher's father. The researcher's father did finally stop physically abusing her mother as he also minimized his drinking several years before her mother's transition. To speak to just how connected the researcher's father was to her mother despite his not being able to really show her love the way she (and he) deserved and needed to be loved, the researcher's father was never able to accept just how sick her mother actually was. In fact, until the day she died, he expected her *to get up from her bed and walk*. Five days shy of four months after her mother's death, the researcher's father died from a stroke on August 10, 1999. He was sixty-seven. The bittersweet tragedy of their lives parallels that of so many others in our communities, past as well as present.

Nineteen ninety-nine was an emotionally difficult year for the researcher and her family. Prior to the deaths of her parents, one of her seven brothers unexpectedly died

from a heart attack on January 6, 1999. He had gone to see a physician less than a week earlier because of chest pains. He was given a precursory examination and sent home with an appointment for two weeks later. He never made it. His heart attack was fatal immediately. Two other of the researcher's siblings have died: a brother who also had a heart attack and died within two days in February 1993, and more recently, a sister who transitioned as the result of a stroke/aneurysm on September 11, 2004. All three of the researcher's siblings were fifty or younger at the time of their deaths and they all—including her parents—lived lives that were stressful, painful, challenging and filled with much unhealed grief—especially ontological grief created to a great extent by the spiritual warfare of racism.

The researcher took the time to mention the deaths of her parents and siblings and the causes of their deaths, including, for some, misdiagnosis and mistreatment, because it is known that the stressful lifestyles of African Americans and other people of color are directly correlated with racism and discrimination, resulting in African Americans being disproportionately affected by heart disease, stroke, cancer and other types of disease as well as in being mistreated, under-treated, or not treated at all.²⁰ It is believed by the researcher that public policy measures and public institutional efforts in collaboration with the actions of churches and other private agencies *can* and *must* be taken to avert the overt as well as covert practices that neglect and jeopardize the health and well-being of any of God's children.

²⁰The National Urban League, *The State of Black America, 2006: The Opportunity Compact* (New York, NY: National Urban League, 2006), 155-164.

Endings that Begin

There is no conclusion.... We think in terms of ends, whereas there really is an eternal procession of new beginnings.... What is defined as the End, is a beginning, always. The limits of misery and of tyranny are the beginnings of joy and freedom. The end of anything whatever is the beginning of something else.²¹

Talbot Mundy

On Good Friday, April 9, 2004, the researcher was blessed with the opportunity to be one of seven people who delivered a sermon on one of Jesus' seven last words at Cornerstone African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Indian Head, Maryland. The researcher was bestowed this honor by the pastor who saw something within the researcher that the researcher was not yet fully aware of herself. It was the first time the researcher delivered a sermon. Despite some nervousness and anxiety, the evening was a blessing and the researcher loved the experience and her spirit felt comfortable in the pulpit. Additionally, she loved the connection with the congregation and the opportunity to focus on and talk about the Lord.

As a consequence of this experience and the continued desire to share God's word, the researcher accepted *the call* into ministry on April 3, 2005—almost one year after preaching on that Good Friday. According to AME protocol, the researcher actually delivered her *first* sermon (some denominations call this a trial sermon) on August 7, 2006. The researcher is currently enrolled in the final year of AME's five-year Board of Examiners classes. She was ordained an itinerant deacon on April 11, 2008 and upon completion of these classes in 2010, per God's will, the researcher will be ordained an

²¹Talbot Munday. *I Say Sunrise!* (Marina del Ray, CA: DeVorss & Company, 1983), 171.

itinerant elder. Her ordination has led to her becoming a hospice chaplain at the agency where she served in the role of a hospice social worker for over four years.

It is the researcher's prayer and hope that throughout her life in ministry, she will allow the free, open and loving spirit of her youth to maintain a dominant presence in her life so that God can use her to be a blessing in the lives of others. The researcher knows it is time for her to fully re-join the circle of life and love and not just position herself on the periphery or at an angle that denies her the opportunity for full participation.

In concluding with an ending that is indeed yet a beginning, the researcher, in writing her spiritual autobiography, was taken back to spaces and places she had not visited or ventured to for some time. A barrage and mixture of feelings emerged as she did so. Most difficult was the reading, re-reading and graphic seeing and feeling of words and pictures that depict but an iota of the atrocities that have been committed against people of African ancestry. In many instances the researcher experienced her heart, mind, soul, and spirit crying for those who have had to endure mind-boggling humiliations and soul-trying indignations—all of which defy any human justification for such wrongs so egregiously committed.

What became even more achingly clear to the researcher is the extent of the deep, pervasive and persistent losses she had experienced—specifically because of being born as one *within the Veil*. Most painful and grievous to her was remembering the conditioned responses she had to her beloved children's birth based upon the negative connotations socially constructed about *blackness* that she too had internalized. It was a response that assured that her children, after over 500 years of *black attack* by the spiritual warfare of racism, would too be born as late as 1982 and 1986, although not in

segregated facilities, but still *within the Veil*. How sad and rightly grievous this perpetual legacy is and should be to all. The researcher grieved for her parents and the millions and millions of other parents and adults, herself included, who have been and are forced to exist in extremely limited life spaces when their spirits, dreams, desires, capacities and creativities were and are so much larger.

For justifiable reasons, African Americans are a grieving and, as James Cone has said, *a blues people*.²² Unfortunately, much of their grief and blues are masked, hidden, obscured, and/or displaced and projected upon each other and also within their own *beings*. The poor state of African American's overall health alone indicates, undoubtedly, the extent of the hurt, pain and grief still being directed against their highest good. Again, there is much to grieve and have the blues about, however, for the sake of the health and well-being of African Americans, they must collectively support each other to heal by resurrecting their true *God image* as they affirm their divinity and sacredness by honoring the beloved temple that their *beings* are—mind, body, soul and spirit too.

As the researcher proclaimed the belief that all of life is spiritual, she trusts that as she has the faith, courage, and commitment to acknowledge, identify, and address the losses she has endured, she will continue to heal and be in a position to minister to and help facilitate the healing of others. The researcher came to believe that it is only by confronting the reality of ontological grief in her own life and delving deeply into understanding this phenomenon from the perspective of spiritual (not personal, fleshly, or worldly) warfare will she be able to transcend its otherwise negative and *dis-spiriting* hold on her and countless others.

²²James H. Cone. *The Spiritual and the Blues* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

In conclusion, the researcher shares a poem she wrote in the summer of 2003 while enrolled in a Sex and Spirituality class at Loyola College in Maryland where she completed the requirements for a Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) in pastoral counseling. It was part of a class presentation the researcher made. In the midst of class discussions, videos, and readings that further evidenced human relationships that are competitive, exclusionary and conflictual, the researcher found herself yearning for the *beloved community* based on the human equality and social justice that Jesus, Martin Luther King, Jr., Howard Thurman, Gandhi, Mother Teresa and many others have lived as well as died for. The poem is entitled, *Finally, Rest!* It expresses what the researcher deemed to be the ultimate purpose we all have in life: to know each other and ourselves in the truth that God created us and to live, as Sung Park envisions, rejoicing in one another's company as we love, love, and love!

Finally, Rest!

How do we come to know ourselves?
 Our purpose for being,
 Our purpose for seeing,
 Beyond stereotypes, rhetoric, and labels
 That seeks to confine us
 But not accurately define us
 In accordance with our capacity
 Or our innate tenacity
 To spread our spiritual wings and fly
 Ever so, so high
 Over worldly customs and norms
 That fail to help us perform
 The kind of responsibilities and roles
 That can touch us way down deep in our souls
 As we come into truth and then know
 What it really means to be made, both male and female,
 In God's image and likeness,

So that the ontological and existential angst
We too often experience can be finished
And, like God, we can see that everything
God made, including us, is very good
And we again, like God,
Can all finally, finally get some rest!

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

Resurrection of An Image is a ministry model centered in love. It's primary goal is to help *set captives free* from believing in and pursuing false images and likenesses that result in relational losses and estrangement from God, our Self, and others. As a ministry, *Resurrection of An Image* ritualizes and offers a sacred place and space by utilizing a house ministry context—specifically for this project the house ministry context of Taranga House Retreat & Practice Center located in Accokeek, Maryland—where co-journeyers can *retreat* from the unlovingness so prevalent in the world and, instead, intentionally practice the essence of *being* love, one with another. *Resurrection of An Image* is a ministry model that reminds us of whose we are (God's), and why we are (to love), as evidenced by dialogue and actions that treat all accordingly.

A major, if not primary, motivation for this ministry effort by the researcher is to help heal the conscious and unconscious grief so many people in society carry about their personhood, about their very Beings because of the untruths, distortions, and distractions of spiritual warfare. While spiritual warfare is legion, the researcher focused particularly on the spiritual warfare of racism and the overall impact it has had on the actuality and functioning of the African American or Black Being. In true heuristic research fashion, the researcher began her ministry project where she found herself *to be* as an African American born and reared in a structurally racist society. It was only as a consequence of

peering deeply into what this reality has meant for her that the researcher came face-to-face with the phenomenon she now terms ontological grief. For the purpose of providing a narrative analysis of the existing literature and models that address the issues and concerns inherent in this ministry model, the researcher specifically focused on grief and loss. Initially, a general overview of grief and loss is provided, followed by coverage that is more specific and germane to the researcher's primary grief interest, ontological grief.

Grief and Loss

All grief, and thus all grief literature, is based on loss. While the type and intensity can vary, all grief has at its core a common denominator: the loss of some *one* or the loss of some *thing*. Grief is viewed by some as "the inevitable response to significant loss; [and that] there is no loss without grief."¹ Others see grief to be more fundamental and basic proclaiming that "[t]here is no life without loss and therefore no life without grief."² There is also the notion that "all changes involve loss, just as all losses require change,"³ which, based on the former two views, implicates the presence, in some form or manner, of grief connoting changes in one's life as a result of loss. No matter the position or perspective, it is inherently clear that loss, grief, and change are intimately connected and are inevitable occurrences in our lives at some juncture and in some manner.

¹Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grief: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983), 86.

²Miriam Greenspan, *Healing through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear, and Despair* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2003), 1.

³Robert Neimeyer, *Lessons of Loss: A Guide to Coping* (Memphis, TN: University of Memphis, 2000), 5.

Another key point about grief and loss is their connection to our needs as humans to be in relationship and to have safe, stable, and secure connections with others. Thus, the innate proclivity to form attachments lie as the basis for grief when loss occurs. The most popular attachment theory used as the basis to give definition and depth to loss and grief has been put forth by British psychiatrist, John Bowlby. Worden, in *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, provides an apt description of Bowlby's attachment theory:

Bowlby's theory is that these attachments come from a need for *security* and *safety*; they develop early in life, are usually directed toward a few specific individuals, and tend to endure throughout a large part of the life cycle. Forming attachments with significant others is considered normal behavior not only for the child but for the adult as well. Bowlby argues that attachment behavior has survival value, citing the occurrence of this behavior in the young of almost all species of mammals.⁴

According to Bowlby's attachment theory, "there are good biological reasons for every separation to be responded to in an automatic, instinctive way with aggressive behavior."⁵ Developmentally, humans, and animals, need to feel the safety and security of being relationally attached in such a way that they can trust exploring their environment and afterwards, be able to return to whomever or whatever is their attachment figure. Whenever this innate need is not met, no matter the reason, and unexpected separation occurs, the experienced loss can immediately trigger the potential for aberrant behavior as Bowlby's attachment theory further establishes:

When the attachment figure disappears or is threatened, the response is one of intense anxiety and strong emotional protest. Bowlby suggests that the child's parents provide the secure base of

⁴J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, 2d ed. (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, Inc., 1991), 7-8.

⁵*Ibid.*, 9.

operation from which to explore. This relationship determines the child's capacity to make affectional bonds later in life. ... Obvious pathological aberrations can develop in this pattern. Inadequate parenting can lead people to either form anxious attachments or to form very tenuous attachments, if any at all. If it is the goal of attachment behavior to maintain an affectional bond, situations that endanger this bond give rise to certain very specific reactions. The greater the potential for loss, the more intense these reactions and the more varied.... If the danger is not removed, withdrawal, apathy, and despair will then ensue.⁶

Bowlby's theory also establishes that "irretrievable loss is not taken into account; that in the course of evolution, instinctual equipment developed around the fact that losses are retrievable and the behavioral responses that make up part of the grieving process are geared toward reestablishing a relationship with the lost object.... This 'biological theory of grief' has been influential in the thinking of many.... The mourning responses of animals show what primitive biological processes are at work in humans. However, there are features of grieving specific only to human beings."⁷

When viewing the literature on grief, the researcher found quite overwhelmingly that grief was addressed from the perspective of the irretrievable nature of death, most especially the death of a loved one. While one can grieve losses that are inanimate—a job, a house, a car, money, a favorite item or keepsake, even the loss of status, position and power—most socially acknowledged and scientifically researched grief is constituted on the more tangible occurrences of physical death. Robert Neimeyer, one who has conducted extensive research on death, grief, loss, and suicide intervention, makes the following comment about *the anatomy of grief* in his book, *Lessons of Loss*:

Much of what we know about the human response to loss derives from studies of adults who have lost a loved one through death. At

⁶Ibid., 8.

⁷Ibid., 9.

least in these cases of profound and irretrievable loss, there appear to be certain common reactions, feelings, and processes of healing for those who are bereaved, although there are also important variations among mourners as a result of who they are, how they typically cope with adversity, and the nature of their relationship to the deceased individual. For this reason, it is misleading to speak of “stages” of grieving, as if all mourners follow the same path in their journey from painful separation to personal restoration.⁸

The normality of grieving, as Worden emphasizes, was recognized by Freud, as early as 1917, when he “saw grieving as a natural process and in *Mourning and Melancholia* wrote that it should not be tampered with.”⁹ Worden also identifies Erich Lindemann as leading “[o]ne of the earliest attempts to look at normal grief reactions in any systematic way.”¹⁰ This attempt occurred when Lindemann, serving as Chief of Psychiatry at the Massachusetts General Hospital, responded with his colleagues in the fall of 1942 to the deaths of almost 500 young people, mostly students from two Catholic colleges in the Boston area, that resulted from a fire at a local nightclub where many went immediately following a rivalry football game between the two schools. Their work with the family members who lost loved ones in this tragedy, resulted in Lindemann writing his classic paper, *The Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief*.¹¹ As Worden states about Lindemann:

From his observations of 101 recently bereaved patients he discovered similar patterns, which he described as the pathognomic characteristics of normal or acute grief. He listed these as: (1) Somatic or bodily distress of some type (2) Preoccupation with the image of the deceased (3) Guilt relating to the deceased or circumstances of the death (4) Hostile reactions [and] (5) The inability to function as one had before the loss. In

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 37.

¹⁰Ibid., 21.

¹¹Ibid.

addition to these five, he described a sixth characteristic exhibited by many patients: they appeared to develop traits of the deceased in their own behavior.¹²

While Lindemann's results are now acknowledged by Worden and others to have many limitations, it nonetheless remains an important and much-quoted study.¹³ It was the publication of *On Death and Dying*, however, in 1969 by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross that helped to open public dialogue about death and to popularize what is now known as the five stages of grief: denial/isolation; anger; bargaining; depression; and, acceptance.¹⁴ Kubler-Ross was also instrumental in helping to establish as well as expand the field of science and study developed specifically to address death among human beings known as thanatology. Thanatology investigates the circumstances surrounding a person's death, the grief experienced by the deceased's loved ones, and the larger social attitudes towards death such as ritual and memorialization. It is primarily an interdisciplinary study that also describes bodily changes that accompany death and the after-death period. Kubler-Ross was a catalyst who's seminal work and books on death and dying helped to revolutionize the way death and dying and the loss and grief associated with them are now viewed and treated by health practitioners and lay people alike.

But just as Neimeyer—himself a thanatologist and psychologist—has indicated above, grief and loss are no longer viewed in linear stages as they were previously considered. Rather, these very common elements of life are seen to be more interconnected and even overlapping as people experience and go through the process, hopefully, of healing. The intensity and duration of grieving a loss can and will vary from

¹²Ibid., 21-22.

¹³Ibid., 22.

¹⁴Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (London, England: Routledge, 1969).

person to person and from situation to situation. For Neimeyer, a grief cycle “begins with anticipation or learning of the death of the loved one, and ... continues through a lifetime of adjustments that follow.”¹⁵ He proposes three phases one experiences and goes through as loss and grief are confronted: avoidance, assimilation, and accommodation.¹⁶

The ability to go through the various stages or phases of grief and, thereafter, accept and accommodate one’s life to the changes the loss or losses inevitably bring is considered to be healthy and normal grief, or grief that is uncomplicated. Uncomplicated grief or uncomplicated mourning has received the attention of many theorists, thanatologists, psychologists, social workers, and other health care practitioners. In addition to Kubler-Ross and Neimeyer, there are many others who have put forth theories about the stages (Zisook, 1987), phases (Bowlby, 1980), dimensions (Schneider, 1984), and tasks (Worden, 1991; Rando, 1995) related to human grieving.¹⁷ Terminology is replete to describe what these many theorists view the end result of grieving to be when uncomplicated: reorganizing and reintegrating; recovery and resolution; finding, exploring, and discovering, and reinvestment. Despite how broad-based the grief lexicon is and its theories, there is agreement that loss and grief and the mourning and changes that accompany them are a natural part of life and can be processed and gone through without undue complications.

Since the human being is more varied than even the literature is on grief, not all people have an uncomplicated grief experience or process of the losses they experience.

¹⁵Neimeyer, 6.

¹⁶Ibid., 6-10.

¹⁷Robert Marrone, *Death, Mourning, and Caring* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1997), 110-111.

A person can get *stuck* in the grieving process, however, making life readjustment difficult and, for some unfortunately, even impossible as they might opt to give up on life both figuratively and literally with the latter potentially resulting in suicide. This type of grief is considered *complicated* or *abnormal*. Complicated grief is a state of being overwhelmed by emotions brought on when someone experiencing loss has having difficulty accepting, processing, and adjusting his or her life accordingly to the changes the loss inherently brings. If severe enough, complicated grief often needs therapy to help resolve the grieving. It can appear in different forms as well as be identified under different labels to include “pathological grief, unresolved grief, complicated grief, chronic grief, delayed grief, or exaggerated grief.”¹⁸

Worden proposes four primary headings to capture the different grief reactions that would be considered complicated. The first is chronic grief or a chronic grief reaction. In this instance, the grief “is excessive in duration and never comes to a satisfactory conclusion.”¹⁹ The chronic griever is aware that the grief is not resolving but yet is still stuck, unable to resolve whatever the unfinished task might be on his or her own. According to Worden, “[a] chronic or prolonged grief reaction requires that the therapist and client assess which of the tasks of grieving are not being resolved and why” with intervention focused on resolving what gets identified.²⁰

Delayed grief is another complicated grief response. It can also be referred to as inhibited, suppressed, or postponed grief reactions. While the person at the time of the

¹⁸Worden, 70.

¹⁹Ibid., 71.

²⁰Ibid.

loss might have a grief reaction, it is usually not sufficient to the actual loss. Later, the person may experience another loss that he or she responds to excessively as some of the grief from the former loss or losses is carried over and presently surfacing. "Overwhelming feelings at the time of the loss may cause the person to delay their grief.... [especially] in the case of a death by suicide."²¹

Exaggerated grief is identified as a third category of complicated grief and is the type of grief reaction, if not resolved, can most lead to behavioral and psychiatric illnesses such as clinical depression, anxiety that leads to panic attacks or phobias, as well as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), mania, and even instances of alcoholism. Grief reactions that are considered exaggerated occurs when "the person experiencing the intensification of a normal grief reaction feels overwhelmed and reports maladaptive behavior."²² The person is generally aware of the connection of their actions and behaviors to their loss experience and are able to say so if and when they seek therapy—an awareness that is absent in masked grief reactions, Worden's forth diagnostic category for complicated grief.

Masked grief, also known as repressed grief, usually exhibits "in one or two ways: either it is masked as a physical symptom or it is masked through some type of aberrant or maladaptive behavior."²³ The person experiencing difficulties from such symptoms and behaviors fail to see or make a connection to his or her loss. It is not uncommon for their outward symptoms to be non-affective. As is commonly known today, feelings not expressed in one way, always get expressed in some other way or

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 74.

ways. The energies from our feelings and emotions may build for a period of time, but eventually they must be released either in healthy or unhealthy ways.

The list of terms associated with or distinguished as grief terminology is not limited to what has been outlined thus far. According to The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children (NITLC), “[t]here are a minimum of fifteen different terms describing grief and mourning.”²⁴ Other names used to identify and describe various types of loss and its consequential aftermath include anticipatory grief, acute grief, disenfranchised grief, and ambiguous loss. They will each be addressed respectively and briefly.

Anticipatory grief is also expected grief because you know beforehand that the death or the loss is going to occur. The researcher, as a current hospice chaplain and a former hospice social worker, sees and is often involved with people experiencing anticipatory grief. When death is anticipated, it is normal to begin to consider how one will react and cope when the person eventually dies. There is the psychological engagement of trying to envision one’s life without the person. A person can have grief reactions comparable to when the person actually dies as one sees his or her life without the person being in it. Anticipatory mourning includes feelings of loss, concern for the dying person, preparing for death and balancing and managing conflicting demands. It is a natural process that enables those experiencing it the opportunity to slowly prepare for the imminent death of a loved one. Anticipatory death provides the chance for loved ones to complete unfinished business with the dying person and vice versa—to include saying good-bye, extending forgiveness, and expressing love.

²⁴“Grief and Trauma,” The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children, <http://www.tlcinst.org/griefandtrauma.html> [accessed March 1, 2008].

Acute grief is defined as,

The crisis that occurs immediately following the death of a person of significance in the bereaved life. It spans a period of about two weeks and includes as its central event the funeral or other ceremonial observances of a ritualistic or religious nature.... [T]he period of acute grief is one in which the survivor must confront stark realities and make crucial, even painful, decisions that may have a profound effect on the restructuring and refocusing of life."²⁵

Disenfranchised grief was first coined and popularized by Kenneth J. Doka in 1987. In 1989 he edited a book by this same name with the subtitle, *Recognizing Hidden Sorrow*. Doka defines disenfranchised grief as grief experienced by a loss in which the survivors are not accorded *a right to grieve*.²⁶ As Doka posits, one's right to grieve is usually determined by a society's grieving rules:

Every society has norms that frame grieving. These norms include not only expected behaviors but also norms for feeling, thinking, and spiritual expression. In other words, when a loss occurs, these grieving rules include not only how one is to behave but also how one is to feel and think. They govern what losses one grieves, how one grieves them, who legitimately can grieve the loss, and how and to whom others respond with sympathy and support. These norms exist not only as folkways, or informally expected behaviors, but also as *laws*.²⁷

Societal grieving rules get expressed in various ways, including company policy that determines whom bereavement leave is extended to, usually immediate family members. Disenfranchised grief is based on losses and grief needs that exist outside traditional grieving norms and can include biological and non-biological family members

²⁵Otto S. Margolis et al., eds., *Acute Grief: Counseling the Bereaved* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1981), inside jacket cover.

²⁶Kenneth J. Doka, ed., *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice* (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 2002), 5.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 6-7.

and animals as well as places and things. As Doka contends, when a “person experiences a loss, but the resulting grief is unrecognized by others[, t]he person has no socially accorded right to grieve that loss or to mourn it in that particular way. The grief is disenfranchised.”²⁸

Disenfranchised grief has expanded the dialogue of thanatologists, psychologists, social workers, and other health care practitioners, much like Kubler-Ross’ five stages of dying changed the dialogue on death. Doka currently identifies five typologies that determine how disenfranchised grief is effected by a society’s particular *grieving rules* (his initial 1989 publication proposed the first three only; the latter two were added in 2002): (1) lack of recognition of the relationship (includes nontraditional relationships such as those that are homosexual, extramarital, cohabital); (2) the loss is not acknowledged (perinatal loss, abortion, infertility, a job, adoption/foster care placement of children, persons institutionalized, comatose); (3) the griever is excluded (the very old and the very young, the physically and mentally challenged); (4) circumstances of the death (suicide, AIDS, mutilation, child death, execution death); and, (5) ways individual’s grieve (stoic, wailing, introverts [at times, too quiet, reserved], extroverts [at other times, too boisterous, loud]).²⁹

Ambiguous loss is loss that is uncertain, unknown, incomplete, and, thus, unresolved. It is the kind of loss that suspends people in uncertainty and in limbo-states and conditions that are contrary to our human need for security as well as, to a great extent, certainty. Boss posits that,

²⁸Ibid., 7.

²⁹Ibid., 10-14.

Unless people resolve the ambiguous loss—the incomplete or uncertain loss—that is inherent in uprooting, and bring into some congruence their psychological and physical families, the legacy of frozen grief may affect their offspring for generations to come, compounding itself as more ordinary losses inevitably occur. This is the legacy of immigration and migration that lies at the root of many personal and family problems.³⁰

Boss identifies two kinds of ambiguous loss. In the first, the person is “physically absent but psychologically present.” Kidnapped children and missing spouses of war exemplify this type of loss. The second kind of ambiguous loss finds the person in a state opposite from the first: a person is physically present but psychologically absent. Alzheimer’s, addictions and other chronic mental illnesses comprise this type of grief. These two types of loss are extremely hard to *get over* and then “those who suffer the loss have to deal with something very different from ordinary, clear-cut loss.”³¹ Boss sees ambiguous loss “as always stressful and tormenting.... [A]mbiguous loss is the most devastating because it remains unclear, indeterminate.... People hunger for certainty. Even sure knowledge of death is welcomed more than a continuation of doubt.... The uncertainty makes ambiguous loss the most distressful of all losses, leading to symptoms that are not only painful but often missed or misdiagnosed.”³²

The grief literature is wrought with many distinguishing terms that describe and define the varying nuances and differences of loss and grief experiences. The grief literature also distinguishes connotative differences between grief, mourning, and bereavement, although they will be found used interchangeably at times. Harvey

³⁰Pauline Boss, *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3-4.

³¹*Ibid.*, 8-9.

³²*Ibid.*, 6-9.

considers grief to be the more private aspect of loss whereas mourning, he contends, is the public showing of loss.³³ The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children (NITLC) establishes that there is one major difference between bereavement and grief: bereavement is reserved specifically for the response to the death of a significant other whereas, grief can be the result of incidents of loss not involving death such as loss of a job, a limb, or status. NITLC also distinguishes mourning as speaking to the way the individual displays his/her grief.³⁴

Aside from all the different terms associated with grief that have been discussed thus far, there is still yet the language of lament to describe our human response to loss and pain. In the opening of the book, *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, editors Brown and Miller, begin as thus: "Cries and prayers of lament erupt from the human heart and voice in the grip of painful experience."³⁵ The book is a series of essays written by Princeton Theological Seminary faculty members. Together, and in various ways, they explore and explicate the rhetoric of grief, protest, and hope as means of gleaning a deeper understanding of lament, particularly biblical lament, and how it is used to shape prayer, proclamation, ministry, and witness in modern life. One of the contributors, Paris, as an African American, focuses on the relevance of lament to the African American community as it first began in Africa. In his article entitled, *When Feeling Like a Motherless Child*, he states:

³³John H. Harvey, *Give Sorrow Words: Perspectives on Loss and Trauma*, (Philadelphia, PA: Brunner/Mazel, 2000), 26.

³⁴"Grief and Trauma," The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children, <http://www.tlcinst.org/griefandtrauma.html> [accessed March 11, 2008].

³⁵Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller, eds., *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), xiii.

For African peoples everywhere the experience of lamentation is as ancient as their days of existence.... The dawn of modernity in the Western world stimulated the rapid growth of the Atlantic slave trade with West Africa. No other event in world history has been more horrendous than the commercialization of African peoples who were bought and sold as commodities for three and a half centuries. Suffice it to say that the breadth and depth of their suffering was unspeakable.... Few can imagine the pain and suffering of a people who were afflicted and abused in every conceivable way. Abducted from a continent where their dignity had been ascribed in accordance with their family's status and forcibly brought to a land where they were afforded no dignity whatsoever, their loneliness was dreadful. In fact, that dread was expressed nowhere more aptly than in the words, 'Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child, a Long Ways from Home.'³⁶

The Bible has long stood as a historical document that renders credence to the actions that evidence the need for lament. From the ousting of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and the wrenching pain, despair and grief this brought upon the biblically recorded first family; to the woes of the Israelites, to those of Job, to those contained within the Psalms, and to the persecutions and martyrdom of Christians, lament has long been a means of crying out against that which contradicts what should be as created, ordered, and ordained by God. People, since times ancient, have found various ways to lament: wailing, crying, renting clothes, smearing themselves with ashes, wearing sackcloth, as well as lying prostrate before God.

Paris' title choice for his article, *When Feeling Like a Motherless Child*, clearly establishes an interconnection between music, song and lament as means by which African Americans have historically given expression to their sufferings and the oppressive conditions thrust upon them. He comments that "[u]nlike the Israelites in the

³⁶Peter J. Paris, "When Feeling Like a Motherless Child" in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square* Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller, eds., (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 111-3.

Babylonian captivity, who we are told hung up their harps on the willow trees because they were unable to sing in a foreign land, the enslaved Africans sang their way through their misery. Building on the rhythm and idiom of their African songs, they created new songs that would address their suffering.”³⁷ Paris acknowledges that it was the ability of the enslaved to express their lamentations through songs that they were thus able to preserve hope and to produce the genre of music still today known as the *spirituals*.

There is one other significant point to establish about the existing grief literature before making more specific parallels to it and ontological grief: just as most of the research and studies on loss have addressed death, the majority of this same research data has been conducted by, on, and with whites. There is a dearth in the grief data as it relates to other ethnic groups and populations that are not white. In their introduction to *African American Grief*, authors Rosenblatt and Wallace state:

In the thousands of English language articles, essays, and books by researchers and practitioners writing about grief following a death, there is little about African American grief.... This is not to say that a small number of studies cannot be immensely important.... But still there are so few works focused on African Americans that it seems that to us that African American grief has been neglected to a remarkable extent. And the neglect is compounded in that, judging by what is reported in the *Social Science Citation Index*, the little that has been written is rarely cited in the wider grief literature.³⁸

Rosenblatt and Wallace provide a qualitative study that involved interviews with twenty-six African Americans who had experienced the death of a loved one. They sought to take into account various cultural, psychological and social variables that impacted the grieving processes of the participants including that of racism. To give

³⁷Ibid., 114.

³⁸Paul C. Rosenblatt and Beverly R. Wallace, *African American Grief* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), xi.

further credence for the need and value of their research, Rosenblatt and Wallace also explored what some of the reasons might be for the neglect of African American grief citing that:

One way to think about it is that many who write about grief may assume that African American grief is no different from that of Euro-Americans.... It certainly is attractive to entertain a simple, generalized view of grief.... One can wonder if theories and knowledge based on an oppressor group in an oppressive system apply to the people who are oppressed.... One can also wonder if white ignorance or neglect of grief or any other aspect of African American life is connected to the larger system of racism and privilege that is almost impossible to escape in the United States.... Just as whites tend to ignore other areas of African American experience ...they may tend to ignore African American grief.... Moreover, African American grief may be aversive for some whites to study, because understanding African American grief could draw whites into understanding the pain and the premature deaths caused by white oppression and indifference to (or ignorance of) that oppression.³⁹

Rosenblatt and Wallace distinctively touch upon the discomforts and challenges many have who are the privileged in a traditionally racist system and culture to study and research with equanimity the factors and components comprising the grief realities of those whom are the oppressed. While they sought to address more of the dynamics that impinge upon the grief of African Americans, Rosenblatt's and Wallace's grief study is still primarily limited to grief via the death of a loved one, not the grief associated with the loss of and about the Truth of one's very own Being as the researcher proposes with ontological grief. Another critical dimension of ontological grief that this research model is addressing are the multitudinous *losses* and *deaths* African Americans have experienced, both personally and collectively as an ethnic/cultural group, most particularly because of

³⁹Ibid., xi-xii.

the spiritual warfare of racism. It is, therefore, not surprising that the researcher had to look to and listen for the voices, memories and narratives that came from those who knew and know well in their soul both the symbol, the ritual and the reality of loss, death, and grief: the African American community.

In her book *Passed On*, author and Duke University professor Holloway, looks at death and dying as an ethnic/cultural phenomenon in twentieth century African America. Using her own grief from the tragic death of an adopted son who was shot and killed as he sought to break free from the place he was imprisoned—both physically and psychically—Holloway immerses herself in the symbolism, ritual, memory and meaning that death and dying has long had in the black community. She states the following about the book's development and intentions:

Passed On explores a century's worth of experience with black death and dying to argue that African American's particular vulnerability to an untimely death in the United States intimately affects how black culture both represents itself and is represented.... I was especially attentive to patterns of black death resulting from white rage targeted at this nation's communities of black folk. The trends... emerged in the collective cultural memory and framed its certain understanding of how we die a color-coded death—the residue of riots, executions, suicides, and targeted medical neglect.... Black death is a cultural haunting, a 're-memory' along the lines of that found in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, which insists that 'not a house in the country ain't packed to the rafters with some dead Negro's grief.'⁴⁰

The conclusion Holloway clearly comes to as she explores and writes poignantly and compassionately about *black death* is that death in African America has been and continues to be a shared community experience, especially those multiple deaths resulting from what this researcher contends to be the spiritual warfare of racism.

⁴⁰Karla FC Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 2-3.

Holloway taps into the lingering grief memories that many African Americans still have because of such death incidents in our collective lives from lynching's; church bombings; the burning and destruction of Rosewood in Florida and many of the Blacks in it; the Tuskegee syphilis study that resulted in the untreated deaths of hundreds; the murders of young Black children in Atlanta in the late 1970s and early 1980s; and, many other haunting death incidents and memories.

Interestingly—and the researcher believes accurately—Holloway credits DuBois for being, perhaps, the first to make the mourning of Blacks public as he wrote in *Souls* about the death of his young son in the chapter entitled, *Of the Passing of the First Born*. Holloway assesses of DuBois and his publicly shared experience with death the following:

When DuBois wrote of his son's passing as 'liberation' and that this child was 'Not dead, not dead, but escaped; not bond, but free,' he made a critical and essential association between his individual, familial loss and the experience of a collective community of blacks in the Americas. In creating this nexus between a black family's grief and African America's national experience, he revealed the cultural dimension of black America's experience with death and dying. From this perspective, then his accounting of his child's burial procession had the character of a public incident report: 'The busy city dinned about us, they did not say much, those pale-faced hurrying men and women; they did not say much,—they only glanced and said, 'Niggers.' Although DuBois mourned the death of his son, he cherished the thought that death had liberated him from living within the veil of race.⁴¹

This accounting of DuBois *public mourning* distinctively shows how the spiritual warfare of racism hounds and haunts Blacks even as they confront death, just as it does as they seek to live life. Cooper-Lewter is another person who addresses the grief inherent in the Black community because of the spiritual warfare of racism. He also puts forth a

⁴¹Ibid., 5-6.

therapeutic model to help in the healing of what he references as *Black grief*. In his seminal work on black grief, Dr. Cooper-Lewter posits that “African Americans form a major symbol of the conscious and unconscious forces that make this country what it is, and our masks tie us together as a whole. But the main bond that we share is racial grief.”⁴² He identifies *soul therapy* as what is needed to heal black or *soul grief*:

This is what soul therapy must do for us today: be a means of overcoming, not merely coping. Jesus did not say I came into the world to cope with it. I think he said somewhere that he had come to overcome it! We seek our health and wholeness. Perhaps we can envision this objective as the classic dialectical tension between good and evil, in which evil is conceived of as good that has been distorted. Were we to remove the distortion we would be left with the good. In the same manner, since the creation of human life was considered good, the original plans must have been that we should be healthy; and if we were intended to be healthy, then whatever we were intended to believe ought to lead us to that health.⁴³

Dr. Cooper-Lewter proposes exactly what *Resurrection of An Image* seeks to do: remove the distortions caused by the spiritual warfare of racism and other untruths of evil so that the *goodness* of our image as God made it to be can be seen. As he deducts from his dialectical analysis between good and evil, once the distortion is removed, only the good will be left. This is an exegetical testament to Paul’s exhortation that admonishes his listeners to “...not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.”⁴⁴ The goal of soul therapy, as it seeks to heal black grief, is to restore Blacks back to the good health

⁴²Nicholas C. Cooper-Lewter, *Black Grief and Soul Therapy* (Richmond, VA: Harriet Tubman Press, 1999), 8.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁴Romans 12:2.

and well-being God intends them to have. Dr. Cooper-Lewter's soul therapy model is akin to the quest of the model being put forth by the researcher.

Another author who, like Lewter-Cooper, recognizes that racial grief results from how we are socialized in this country predicated on race is Anne Cheng. As an Asian American seeking to intricately comprehend "the web of American racial dynamics and their particular articulations of aspiration and rejection, assimilation and expulsion,"⁴⁵ Cheng's work on what she has come to term *racial melancholia* has culminated into insights and understandings such as the following that outlines the intent of her recent publication, *The Melancholy of Race*:

Though a difficult topic and thus rarely discussed, the social and subjective formations of the so-called racialized or minority subject are intimately tied to the psychical experience of grief.... We need to take on the task of acknowledging racial grief in a theoretically and socially responsible way... This book grows out of this need to find an intellectually rigorous vocabulary to talk about racial grief When we turn to the long history of grief and the equally protracted history of physically and emotionally managing that grief on the part of the marginalized, racialized people, we see that there has always been an interaction between *melancholy* in the vernacular sense of affect, as "sadness" or the "blues," and *melancholia* in the sense of a structural, identificatory formation predicated on—while being an active negotiation of—the loss of self as legitimacy.⁴⁶

The thrust of *Resurrection of An Image* is to identify, address, and help heal the melancholic impact that the spiritual warfare of racism has on constituting the identity and shaping the subjectivity of its targets. What Cheng labels as the *melancholy of race* and Cooper-Lewter references as *black grief* are comparable to, although not exactly like, what the researcher is terming *ontological grief*. A primary difference between the more

⁴⁵ Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), xii.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, x-xi, 20.

traditional typologies of grief that have been presented and discussed from the literature and ontological grief (Cooper-Lewter and Cheng being the exceptions) is that, after a loss or losses that are external to one's self or sense of being, the former seeks and expects acceptance, accommodation, adjustment, reintegration, and thus normalcy to eventually occur in the griever's life.

The irretrievability of the lost object and, thus too, the loss itself is expected to be processed in a way such that the griever works through and, ultimately, moves to a stabilized state of *Being* that includes acceptance and adjustment to the deceased person no longer being a part of his or her life—at least not physically. Ontological grief, on the other hand, is based on a loss of relationship or, rather, on a loss of relationships that are retrievable: the relationship one has with God, Self, and others. While the more traditional grief literature is focused on losses whose base-of-attachment are more worldly, including Cheng and, to a lesser Cooper-Lewter, ontological grief is biblically and theologically premised and its base-of-attachment is, first and foremost, is God.

The researcher identifies what she considers three relational determinants of ontological grief that are hierarchically positioned: (1) estrangement from God; (2) estrangement from Self; and, (3) estrangement from others, i.e., one's neighbors. All three are based on the two greatest and comparable commandments issued by Jesus that admonishes one to, first and foremost, love God with everything one has within him/her and secondly, to love those who are neighbors like one loves oneself.⁴⁷ It is to be noted that this request put forth by Jesus immediately establishes the divine paradox inherent in love's hierarchical, yet reciprocal and inclusive nature for one cannot claim to love God,

⁴⁷Matthew 22:37-40.

but not love one's self, just as one cannot claim to love God and Self and not simultaneously love those whom are neighbors, i.e., sisters and brothers. The apostle John makes the latter case adamantly clear when he declares,

If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother [or sister], he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother [or sister], whom he [or she] has seen; cannot love God, whom he [or she] has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother [and sister].⁴⁸

There is another biblical and theological point to be made about this triune relationship that underpins ontological grief: God, in God's omniscience, placed His Spirit within His creations. So, to reject any part of one's *Being* as God created one *to be*, is to simultaneously reject and distance, i.e., estrange, one's Self and the Self of others from God as well. This ontological reality is so significant, it is iterated at least twice by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.⁴⁹

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.⁵⁰

Our interconnectedness, one to another, was first established by God during the act of creation and, unless changed by God, remains eternal. It is this Truth that emboldens Paul to say in his Roman epistle:

⁴⁸1 John 4:20-21.

⁴⁹1 Corinthians 3:16-17.

⁵⁰1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁵¹

Ontological grief is the estrangement that occurs from God because of the loss of truth about the Self that is always predicated on a false perception. This loss of truth, if not corrected and healed, can lead to various and multiple expressions of loss—even death—as the very ground of one's *being*, perceptually, is no longer centered in the One who created him/her in God's own image and likeness. Ontological grief is indicative of God's creations no longer having conscious and committed connection to and communion with this ultimate, foundational, and ontological reality.

Ontological grief, in essence, results from the spiritual disruption that occurs when there is a loss of love for God, self, and others that immediately ushers in psychological, emotional, and even physical pain, angst, and eventual death in the forms of idolatry, addictions, narcissism, nihilism, racism, and a legion of other *isms and schisms* that falsely make a person believe he/she is separated from the love of God. It is this sense and feel of separation that creates the proverbial *void* or emptiness in one's life that one is constantly seeking, in various forms and manners, to fill with what one hopes will be meaningfulness, fulfillment, and contentment.

The grief literature distinguishes the griever's tendency to search for the deceased or missing person in his or life. There is indeed a void that the person needs and wants to be filled. With ontological grief, this void that stems from relational loss can only be

⁵¹Romans 8:35-39.

filled by and with God. This truth is captured by Powell in *The Lonely Heart*:

Perhaps we have been searching for a satisfaction in a human being which we can find in God alone. He is our soul's final rest, and all our relationships are fulfilled only when related to Him. 'Thou shalt have none other Gods before me.' It is possible for us, sometimes, to make an idol of another person. Never must anybody be put in *His* place. 'Whoso gives God a secondary place,' said Ruskin, 'gives Him no place at all. He must be first. Then all other relationships fall into their rightful position. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,' said Jesus.⁵²

Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection symbolizes what the requirements are for the healing of ontological grief. We literally have to *crucify* or *nail to the cross* those things that seek to keep us unconscious and consumed by ignorance, darkness, evil, untruths, materialism and all else that can categorically be called worldly or spiritual warfare. Once these things are crucified and the illusions and distortions removed, then God's truths and that which God has created to be very good can *resurrect*.

As for the ontological grief specifically experienced by African Americans because of the spiritual warfare of racism, healing will come when our true images are resurrected from the graves many of us have been psychologically, emotionally, and, even prematurely, physically buried in and covered by the debris of spiritual warfare's vicious evils.

The researcher, upon establishing the primary difference between ontological grief and other types of grief already identified, does see some parallels or commonalities amongst them, especially with certain types of identified grief forms. Despite the parallelisms, however, differences are still to be distinguished. The grief types and the respective parallels and differences include:

⁵²Cyril H. Powell, *The Lonely Heart: The Answer to the Problem of Loneliness through Life* New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1960), 61-2.

Abnormal or Complicated Grief – Ontological grief is abnormal in that it is not normal for God's creations to be out of loving and obedient with God. Because relationships that are spiritually estranged from God are so prevalent in modern day culture and society, such relationships now appear as if they are actually the norm rather than its opposite. Complications indeed arise as one is out of loving relationship with God. There is an order to love that informs one the way to love. Jesus exemplified this order by showing that God was always his first and primary source for power, guidance, direction, and inspiration. Jesus was able to live a full life and to fulfill his purpose in life based on his connected—not estranged or abnormal—relationship with God. Jesus' attachment to God was healthy and clear, just as it was safe and secure. Jesus never ventured too far or sought to do too much before returning to again attach to God in prayer, solitude, and fellowship. Jesus was able to perform so many miracles because his *being* was literally filled with and by the power of love—of God's love for the world. Spiritual warfare, whether of racism or any other *ism*, seeks to sever the attachment to God and to place other things, people, ideas, thoughts, distortions in the way of clear communication and safe connection to God and God's power. When one cannot hear, feel, and yes, taste and see God in one's life, one is indeed experiencing ontological grief—grief that results from that which is abnormal and complicated.

Disenfranchised Grief – While Doka's loss and grief focus differs from that of the researcher, the language of disenfranchised grief does aptly categorize and capture the experiences many have who are suffering from what the researcher is terming ontological grief. Ontological grief is akin to disenfranchised grief in that the grieving rules that Doka identifies,⁵³ as well as the living rules the researcher adds, fail to give permission for one to grieve the loss of not being in loving, right, and truthful relationship with God and, thus too, not with one's Self and others. Both the living rules and the grieving rules of the world fail to acknowledge or place God as the priority or first. Just as permission is not socially granted for certain populations and people to publicly grieve, those suffering from ontological grief are not socially sanctioned to grieve or pine after God as one's lost love object. This is especially true in the case of the spiritual warfare of racism because

⁵³Doka, ed. *Disenfranchised Grief*, 2002, 7-10.

the denial of racism's existence, and definitely of its devastating toll in and on the lives of those it targets, is so dense it is actually pathological and destructive for the whole of society. Indeed, it is anticipated by the researcher that the living and grieving rules of society, as well as the fear, shame, guilt, discomfort, and even anger associated with the need to directly confront and address the horridness of the spiritual warfare of racism and the negative impact it has on all its victims—past and present—will make it difficult for many to recognize and respect the legitimacy of ontological grief and, consequently, will seek to deny its sufferers *the right to grieve*.

Ambiguous Loss – Ambiguous loss offers useful definitions and descriptors that are applicable to ontological grief. Clearly, ontological grief, until resolved and healed, is always stressful and tormenting. There also exists the state of ambiguity as those who suffer from ontological grief are commonly compelled psychically and emotionally to pursue worldly answers to resolve their “inner loss of *being*,” whereas their spirit is yearning for them to know themselves, not according to worldly values and standards, but in God's spirit and truth. This internal ambiguity is what has come to be known as existential anxiety. The researcher, in viewing ontological grief as the foundational grief upon which all other grief typologies are based, disagree with Boss in her identification of ambiguous loss as the most distressful of all losses.⁵⁴ The losses inherent in ontological grief are all based on the loss, first and foremost, of *not being* in loving and connected relationship with God. The loss/losses that occur from this severed state clearly are the most stressful that anyone, as God's creations, can ever experience. The ensuing losses—loss of loving relationship and connection with self and others and all the resulting negative ramifications that occur—are a direct consequence of the loss of loving relationship with God. Until there is (re)union with God—the primary One who is our lost, but *retrievable love object and subject*—ontological grief will always be ambiguous and unresolved. When one is experiencing ontological grief, ambiguity cannot be tolerated either. Jesus has clearly said that “we

⁵⁴Pauline Boss, *Ambiguous Loss*, 1999, 6-9.

cannot serve two masters, for either we will love one and hate the other, or we will be devoted to one and despise the other.”⁵⁵

Having ambiguity about who God is in one’s life is akin to one being lukewarm. Biblically, one is told that when one is in such an internal state or condition, God will spew the person out of His mouth (cast away from Him) for being neither hot nor cold. For God prefers that someone is one way or the other.⁵⁶ Ontological grief, like ambiguous loss, causes an anguished and intolerable state until one is able to “be still and know that God is God,”⁵⁷ and allow Him to take away and heal the ambiguity.

Anticipatory Grief - While the *subject* of loss focus is different, ontological grief does have elements of anticipatory grief. Because the spiritual warfare of racism has been and continues to be so prevalent and pervasive in society, there is the conditioned anticipation of this form of spiritual warfare to rear its ugly head for attack almost, if not actually, on a daily basis. And like anticipatory grief, it is normal for those targeted to begin to consider how one will react and cope when this ontological culprit does strike. Unlike anticipatory grief, however, the uncertainties inherent in the spiritual warfare of racism’s imminence does not lead to the preparatory opportunities afforded persons who anticipate the imminent death of a loved family member or friend. In fact, the two are antithetical to one another in this regard. Ontological grief resembles anticipatory grief only in instances where the former grievers know that spiritual death for them is imminent if they do not stop being ambiguous with their love and loyalties and choose, instead, to clearly make God, Lord and master over their lives. Anticipatory grief, as an element of ontological grief, can only be healed when a loving, intimate, and primary relationship is established with God. The difference between ontological grief and anticipatory grief is that God, as the lost object, is always retrievable and *death* does not have to be imminent. Persons with ontological grief who have insight enough to

⁵⁵Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13.

⁵⁶Revelation 3:15-16.

⁵⁷Psalms 46:10.

anticipate their own spiritual death as a result of not being in loving relationship with God also has the internal power and authority to heal by choosing “to have life and have it more abundantly”⁵⁸ as Jesus has come to assure that we can. While the above distinctions and similarities have been made, all grief, as previously stated, is based, in some way, on loss—loss that is initially based on our need as humans for attachment. Unlike other grief, however, the primary object of loss and all losses associated with ontological grief are retrievable. One can always retrieve the relationship with God, for one’s attachment to God, in truth, is never severed or changed whether or not we recognize, live by, or honor this fundamental Truth. One can always retrieve or “resurrect” the truth about who one is and, thus too, *be* it. This means not only resurrecting the Truth about our own sacredness and divinity, but also that of all our sisters and brothers formed in God’s image and likeness as well.

The pivotal positioning of ontological grief as a foundational grief is considered justified by the researcher because when one has grief at his/her core level—at the very essence of and about the fundamental nature of who one perceives Self and others *to be*—one is disabled from the onset in one’s capacity to functionally and healthily deal with other losses that inevitably occur during the course of one’s life. The opposite of this is true as well because when one has triune love—love for God, self, and others—and the person believes in the eternal interconnectedness of all relationships, one is best able to process, cope, deal with, manage, work through, go through, accept, accommodate, reintegrate, and even resurrect over, above and even beyond our status prior to the loss or losses. Humans are spiritually, and thus too psychologically and emotionally, equipped with the full armor of God to grow and develop from our losses rather than get

⁵⁸John 10:10.

diminished, distressed or devastated by them because “we know that all *things* work together for good to them that love God, to them who are *the* called according to His purpose.”⁵⁹

Although the actual term *ontological grief* was not found in current or former grief literature, its particular relation to the spiritual warfare of racism and the consequential losses and pain it brings can indeed be found, heard, seen, and felt in the voices, cries, moans, songs, stories, and laments of many Africans and African Americans over the course of centuries as expressed in literary narratives, both non-fiction and fiction; the visual arts; music; dance; film; poetry; theatre; and, all other possible means of human communication that allow our living, loving, dying, grieving, and transcending to be told. As some of these *findings* are shared, the reader is cautioned that in certain instances the evidence presented might seem lengthy and even, to some, too in-depth; to this possibility the researcher responds: and so has been and is the ontological grief within, between, and amongst us as a people of African ancestry, most especially because of the spiritual warfare of racism.

The researcher now presents some of these findings, beginning aboard one of the too many ships that brought millions upon millions of Africans to the horrors of human evil and slavery. This particular ship, however, brought Kunta Kinte, the sixth generation ancestor of Alex Haley who was instrumental in the latter’s writing of *Roots*—an epic saga that continues to tell the ghastliness of slavery along with the incredible tenacity of the human spirit to live because of and despite of:

Kunta’s naked back felt an odd vibration from the hard, rough planking he lay on. He felt a tightening, a swelling within his chest, and he lay frozenly. About him he heard thudding sounds

⁵⁹Romans 8:28, (KJV).

that he knew were men lunging upward, standing against their chains. It felt as if all of his blood had rushed into his pounding head. And then terror went clawing into his vitals as he sensed in some way that this place was moving, taking them away.... The anguished cries, weeping, and prayers continued, subsiding only as one after another exhausted man went limp and lay gasping for breath in the stinking blackness. Kunta *knew* that he would never see Africa again.... Then the toubob [white men] were almost shrieking their curses, and the lights could be seen changing hands as one man spelled the other with the lash. Finally the beaten man began screaming.... The moans of the Foulah shivered through the black hold. Then, after a while, a clear voice called out in Mandinka, 'Share his pain! We must be in this place as one village!'⁶⁰

When ontological grief is present, it is never present alone for its nature, like love's, is reciprocal and inclusive. The loss, and inevitably the losses, the pain, the sorrow, and the grief are, indeed, shared for the impact affects the entire human village. This inclusivity and reciprocity remains true for the toll from the spiritual warfare of racism as well. Both the perpetrator and the one perpetrated against suffers, just as all lose something from the fullness of our human possibilities when hatred and evil come and imposes wedges and disconnections in the human relational order. Martin Luther King, Jr. so profoundly understood these devastating dynamics which is why he clearly understood that injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere. The researcher travels now to the annals left by the legendary David Walker where she found additional data to show evidence of ontological grief.

When Walker first wrote and self published in 1830 his *Appeal To the Colored Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States of America*, it was then, and remains now an impassioned treatise against what the researcher is terming ontological grief. *Walker's Appeal* defied the efforts of

⁶⁰Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1976), 156,158.

racists—those who were perpetrators of the spiritual warfare of racism—to deny the God-given rights of Blacks *to be*. Walker knew well in his soul that the heinous institution of slavery and the barbaric treatment inflicted against those whom he referenced as, the colored citizens of the world, were totally contrary to what is biblical and of God. He knew that these acts and actions were those of spiritual warfare; just as he knew they were responsible for the suffering, pain, death and grief of the multitude that were its victims. And although Walker did not use the specific language of ontological grief, he knew and understood its detriment well, which is why he fought so determinedly against it up until his so-called mysterious death in 1830, at the young, but dynamically lived age of forty-five. In his *Appeal*, Walker writes:

Indeed, the way in which religion was and is conducted by the Europeans and their descendants, one might believe it was a plan fabricated by themselves and the *devils to oppress* (italics by the author) us. But hark! My master has taught me better than to believe it—he has taught me that his gospel as it was preached by himself and his apostles remains the same, notwithstanding Europe has tried to mingle blood and oppression with it. It is well known to the Christian world, that Bartholomew Las Casas, that very very notoriously avaricious Catholic priest or preacher...proposed to his countrymen, the Spaniards in Hispaniola to import the Africans This wretch, (“Las Casas, the Preacher”) succeeded so well in his plans for oppression, that in 1503, the first blacks had been imported into the new world.... Thus we see, through the instrumentality of a *pretended preacher* (emphasis mine) of the gospel of Jesus Christ our common master, our wretchedness first commenced in America-where it has been continued from 1503, to this day, 1829. A period of three hundred and twenty-six years.⁶¹

Walker was born September 28, 1795 in Wilmington, Delaware as a free person solely because of his mother’s manumitted status at the time. He was taught by his

⁶¹David Walker, *David Walker’s Appeal To the Colored Citizens of the World*, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the *United States of America*, 3d and final ed., first published in 1980, with an introduction by J. Turner (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1993), 55-56.

mother to abhor the evils of slavery and he had the opportunity to travel throughout much of the South where he witnessed, firsthand, the degrading and vileness of human bondage, which served to fortify his resolve to fight against it. Walker immersed himself in academic pursuits and, by all standards, was indeed a brilliant and fastidious scholar. It is reported that he spent as long as a decade researching and studying a variety of subjects as he prepared to write the *Appeal*, inclusive of history, theology, philosophy and the sociology of slavery.⁶² As Turner says of Walker and his intellectual legacy in the introduction of the third edition of the *Appeal*:

David Walker's presentation was an authentic African-centered discourse on liberation and the essential human rights of an oppressed people. African American political philosophy has evolved from many of the themes articulated in the *Appeal*. There is an intellectual link traceable from Walker's principles to the principles articulated by two more contemporary activists: Martin Luther King's proposition that racism is inevitably a vicious sin and that God commands us to resist injustice by civil disobedience, and Malcolm X's assertion of the right to self-defense, that human rights supercede civil rights, and that the fight for freedom is justified by any means necessary.⁶³

This year, 2008, marks one hundred seventy-eight years since Walker first published his *Appeal* and his spirited passion for justice and truth is still felt just as his call for Godly love of all of God's people and, thus too, for the healing of ontological grief still profoundly resonates. His words are again shared and the astuteness of his biblical and theological understanding of the hypocrisy inherent within those of us who proclaim to be Christians but fail to love and treat our brothers and sisters justly:

Christian Americans, not only hinder their fellow creatures, the Africans, but thousands of them *will absolutely beat a coloured*

⁶²Ibid., 10.

⁶³Ibid., 11.

person nearly to death, if they catch him on his knees, supplicating the throne of grace (italics by the author). . . . “The word,” said he, “which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace, by Jesus Christ, (he is Lord of all). Have not the Americans the Bible in their hands? Do they believe it? Surely they do not. See how they treat us in open violation of the Bible!!”⁶⁴

As the findings of ontological grief continue, another person, like Walker, whose spiritual understanding of God’s divine creation of all people merited ceaseless assault against the amorality and cruelty of human bondage was the seemingly indefatigable Sojourner Truth. Born as Isabella in the questionable year of 1797 in Hurley, Ulster County, New York to Dutch enslavers, Truth became renown during the majority of her lifespan as an unrelenting activist for the abolition of slavery, the suffrage of women, and for the self-determination of African Americans until her death in Michigan in 1883. Truth was a person who stood tall in stature (at least six feet) as well as in oral eloquence. According to Washington’s description of her in the introduction to *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, Truth “was a mystic and a witty, folksy storyteller whose narrations always contained a compelling message. . . . [and who] was an omnipresent, quintessential figure among the progressive forces that refashioned nineteenth-century America.”⁶⁵

Truth was oft recognized as one far wiser than her formal, or rather non-formal, education belied. Although illiterate, she was *one of the most quoted activists* during her lifetime and “her penetrating one-line comments captured the heart of moral, social, political, and religious issues.”⁶⁶ As Washington further comments about Truth:

⁶⁴Ibid., 56-7.

⁶⁵Margaret Washington, ed. and Introduction, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (New York, NY: Vintage Classics, 1993), ix.

⁶⁶Ibid., x.

Although she could not read, Sojourner Truth memorized most of the Bible and quoted it at length throughout her life. Combined with her intuitive religious insights, this kind of orality reflected her African heritage more than her American environment. Her mother's mysticism did not come from an institutional church. Taking her children out at night to commune with the stars, moon, and a god was not taught Elizabeth by the Dutch Reformed Church. These customs were undoubtedly vestiges of African ontology.⁶⁷

It was Truth's now famous, "Ar'n't I A Woman" oration that has recognizably helped to catapult her into an indelible place in American history. Delivered at the 1851 (some sources say 1852) Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, Truth, apparently not one originally scheduled to speak, made the request and was granted permission to do so. Since the speech was not recorded at that time, different variations have emerged as to the speech's actual content. The researcher shares an excerpt from a version that has been adapted into poetic form by Erlene Stetson as included in a book of poetry by women around the world, edited by Linthwaite and accordingly named after Truth's speech, *Ain't I A Woman*:

That man over there say
a woman needs to be helped into carriages
and lifted over ditches
and to have the best place everywhere.
Nobody ever helped me into carriages
or over mud puddles
or gives me a best place...
And ain't I a woman?⁶⁸

While the exact content of Truth's speech might be debated, what is not, however, is the veracity of her query that simultaneously affirms her *isness* as a woman and denounces any efforts by others to ontologically deny the authenticity of her *Being*.

⁶⁷Ibid., xxvii.

⁶⁸Erlene Stetson, "Sojourner Truth: Ain't I A Woman" in *Ain't I A Woman: A Book of Women's Poetry from Around the World*, ed. Illona Linthwaite, (New York, NY: Wings Books, 1993), 129-130.

In the latter part of Truth's now renowned speech, she mentions her grief as a mother, witnessing her thirteen children most all sold into slavery, with none, but Jesus, hearing and heeding the anguish of her cries⁶⁹ is indicative of the ontological grief caused by the spiritual warfare of racism—grief both incalculable and immeasurable, and whose ramifications remain unhealed yet today.

Ontological grief is to be found in W.E.B. DuBois' recognition that the great suffering and pain of Blacks during his time could be woefully heard in what he came to call sorrow songs:

They that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days—
Sorrow Songs—for they were weary at heart.... in which the soul
of the black slave spoke to men.... What are these songs, and what
do they mean? ... They are the music of an unhappy people, of the
children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and
unvoiced longing [i.e., ontological grief] toward a truer world, of
misty wanderings and hidden ways."⁷⁰

Ontological grief is the catalyst that spurred the decision made by Mamie Till-Mobley to demand an open-casket funeral for her fourteen year-old son, Emmett who was kidnapped from his bed one night while visiting family in Mississippi in August 1955 and brutally murdered by two White men for allegedly whistling at one of the men's wife in a convenient store. The two men were later acquitted despite mounting evidence that they committed the heinous crime. As Holloway has commented about the vicious death of young Till, "the story of Till's lynching lingered like melancholy in the memory of black folk."⁷¹ In *Death of Innocence*, Mrs. Till-Mobley herself decries:

⁶⁹Ibid., 130.

⁷⁰W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1903), 177-180.

⁷¹Holloway, *Passed On*, 7.

So much was running through my head at the moment I stood there, at the funeral home... as I gazed at the mutilated body that once had been my son [i.e., ontological grief]. At that moment I didn't see what I possibly could gain from the worst experience anyone could ever have. All I felt was the vast emptiness left by what had been lost. Into that void, I kept pouring so much pain and, oh, yes, so much anger. Emmett hadn't done anything to deserve what was done to him. What was done to him by those men was savage, it was barbaric, and I wasn't about to let them get away with it.... I told Mr. Rayner I wanted an open-casket funeral.... It would be important for people to look at what happened on a late Mississippi night when nobody was looking, to consider what might happen again if we didn't look out. This would not be like so many other lynching cases, the hundreds, the thousands of cases where families would be forced to walk away and quietly bury their dead and their grief and their humiliation [i.e., ontological grief]. I was not going quietly. Oh, no, I was not about to do that. I knew that I could talk for the rest of my life about what had happened to my baby, I could explain it in great detail... one piece, one inch, one body part, at a time. I could do all of that and people still would not get the full impact. They would not be able to visualize what had happened. They had to see what I had seen. The whole nation had to bear witness to this.⁷²

Ontological grief is found in the lyrics of "Strange Fruit," written by Lewis Allen and sung by Billie Holiday with a deep, guttural knowing of the mind-boggling pain and the stupefying grief one is left with after personally witnessing or even hearing about the charred and mutilated corpse of one of the thousands brutally and inhumanely lynched as a result of the spiritual warfare of racism. It has been reported that between 1882 and 1942, more than four thousand African Americans were lynched.⁷³ Of these numbers, very few of the perpetrators were ever brought to justice. Dray states in his documentary book on lynching:

⁷²Mamie Till-Mobley and Christopher Benson, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America* (New York, NY: One World Ballantine Books, 2003), 138-139.

⁷³J. Paul Mitchell, *Race Riots in Black and White* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970), 31.

Regardless of any statistics, it is a living memory to most black Americans that their forebears were lynched and routinely subjected to violence and intimidation, and that they lived in an almost constant fear of seeing a loved one lynched or of being targeted themselves [i.e., ontological grief].... Is it possible for white America to really understand blacks' distrust of the legal system, their fears of racial profiling and the police, without understanding how cheap a black life was for so long a time [and still is] in our nation's history?... There is much killing in American history, a great deal of it no doubt senseless and unnecessary, but lynching celebrates killing and makes of it a ritual, turning grisly and inhumane acts of cruelty into theater with the explicit intent that they be viewed and remembered. It is this ritualization, and the knowledge that victims were chosen for their race and put to death [i.e., ontological grief] in specific defiance of reasonable values of fairness and decency, that makes the story of lynching so burdensome an American legacy to confront.⁷⁴

Ontological grief is heard, felt and empathically understood in William R. Jones' "uncommon religious conversion from black Christian fundamentalism to black religious humanism" as he begs the question, "Is God a White Racist?"⁷⁵ It is in the "nihilistic threat" to black America spawned by corporate market institutions falsely tantalizing our sensibilities and appetites as we become reduced to what Dr. Cornel West identifies as *objects of pleasure*.⁷⁶ West further expounds the conditions confronting African Americans in *Race Matters*:

Like all Americans, African Americans are influenced greatly by the images of comfort, convenience, machismo, femininity, violence, and sexual stimulation that bombard consumers. These seductive images contribute to the predominance of the market-inspired way of life over all others and thereby edge out nonmarket values-love, care, service to others-handed down by preceding generations. The predominance of this way of life among those

⁷⁴Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York, NY: Random House, 2002), xi-xii.

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living in poverty-ridden conditions, with a limited capacity to ward off self-contempt and self-hatred, results in the possible triumph of the nihilistic threat in black America. A major contemporary strategy for holding the nihilistic threat at bay is a direct attack on the sense of worthlessness and self-loathing in black America [i.e., ontological grief]. This *angst* resembles a kind of collective clinical depression in significant pockets of black America. The eclipse of hope and collapse of meaning in much of black America is linked to the structural dynamics of corporate market institutions that affect all Americans. Under these circumstances black existential *angst* derives from the lived experiences of ontological wounds and emotional scars inflicted by white supremacist beliefs and images permeating U.S. society and culture. These beliefs and images attack black intelligence, black ability, black beauty, and black character daily in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.... The accumulated effect of the black wounds and scars suffered in a white-dominated society is a deep-seated anger, a boiling sense of rage, and a passionate pessimism regarding America's will to justice [i.e., ontological grief].⁷⁷

Ontological grief is heard and felt and sometimes seen as rage as the discriminations and injustices seem ceaseless. Oftentimes, it is delayed release as Black grief resulting from the spiritual warfare of racism is also disenfranchised grief as the grieving rules of society as Doka references them, do not give permission for Black grief to be public without repercussions that are usually negative. Raboteau, in recounting his "spiritual journey as an African-American man in late twentieth-century America," shared the following incidents about his life:

I was born into a family that was Roman Catholic as far back as we knew. I was baptized in St. Rose de Lima, a black church, and given the name Albert Jordy, after my dead father [who was killed three months before I was born by a white man]. When I was two, my mother, my sisters, and I moved to the North, partly because of what had happened to my father. The white man who killed him had claimed self-defense; there were no witnesses; the white man was not prosecuted [i.e., ontological grief]. My mother decided that she did not us to be raised in the South. So I grew up far away

⁷⁷Ibid., 17-18.

from my relatives, my extended family, but we returned during the summers to visit relatives down home.⁷⁸

Unfortunately, the Raboteau's family experience is not an uncommon one as many in the South, especially during the heinous days of Jim Crow, lived the same devastating fate: a family member murdered, usually the male who was significant to the household as a husband, father, son, etc.; there are no repercussions for the murderer who was usually White and usually considered justified, no matter the circumstances; the clear message is received by the entire Black (and White) community of the expendability of the Black being, of Black life, of Black existence period; the family has to uproot and move, usually up North, leaving other family, friends behind to have to start all over; ontological grief and fear is instilled all the more; the cycle continues just as does Raboteau's story:

One summer down South I remember especially well. I remember it as the summer of my education. I remember the sea foam of the Bay, white against blue sky and dark water, the sea salt smell sharp in the humid air. We stop the car beside the beach; the hot sand burns my bare feet. 'Y'all can't swim theah, heah!' Two old white ladies sitting on their front porch: 'Y'all can't swim theah!' 'Our little boy just wants to wet his feet in the water.' 'Y'all can't swim theah; you go down to Waveland, the cullud beach at Waveland.' We get back in the car; we leave.⁷⁹

The innocence of a young boy who just wants to do what is natural and, seemingly, logical: go swimming on a hot, summer day, even just get his feet wet. But no, the spiritual warfare of racism will not allow it and he is left to ponder in his heart and mind, "Why not?" What is wrong with me? What is wrong with us? Why is it this way?" And as he wonders with a dark cloud over and his family

⁷⁸ Albert Raboteau, *A Sorrowful Joy* (Mahwah, New Jersey, 2002), 14-15.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 15.

that he does not yet fully understand, ontological grief continues to build as does his story:

Heat from the pavement rises in dizzy waves when we go downtown shopping. Inside the department store, cool dark aisles, aisles of clothes to hide in. A woman's store; I'm bored. Over there, I see a water fountain, humming, metal, and shiny. I'm about to drink and I'm pulled back. 'You can't drink there.' 'But I'm thirsty, Ma!' Then I see the sign, 'For Whites.' 'Come with me.' Down one aisle, around a corner, to a porcelain fountain 'For Colored.' I drink tepid water. I feel my mother's fury. I drink; it is bitter. I feel her clenched rage.⁸⁰

Ontological grief is that which stops a mother from being able to explain to her young, innocent and rightfully thirsty son why he can just drink water from a fountain to quench his thirst. Ontological grief is that which causes him to drink as much of his mother's defiant fury and pained rage as he does the water from the porcelain fountain distinctively inferior and clearly marked for all to see, 'For Colored.' And all the time ontological grief is growing, growing even faster and bigger than he is:

Sunday morning we woke up late, too late for the last Mass at St. Rose de Lima. So we went to the white church, Our Lady of the Gulf, which my grandfather had helped build as a carpenter. Inside, white ushers direct us to sit in the back. We squeeze into a half pew with two other black worshipers. Two white men in front of us have a whole pew; they stretch out their arms on the back of their pew. Communion time comes. I go up and kneel at the rail. The priest, carrying the host, passes me by, and again passes me by, carrying the host in his hands, passing me by, until he had given communion to all the white people. I stumble back from communion, hot-faced with shame, a blur of numbness. Afterward, we drive away. I remain silent.⁸¹

⁸⁰Ibid., 15-16.

⁸¹Ibid., 16-17.

Ontological grief, in the depths of its great and massive pain, often brings silence to its sufferers. Why not? After all, it is the intention of the spiritual warfare of racism to make sure that the aftermath of its actions is not just a silenced being, but a being that is no longer alive to its own truth, a truth that exists only in God. But maybe with the passage of time, things can and have changed. Maybe there still is hope to be found within the church where Raboteau can find the freedom to just be:

Forty years later, on a research trip to Charleston, I went to Mass in the cathedral in the old, historic district downtown. Late, I sit in back. At communion time, I rise to stand in line in a sea of white faces. I stand and I can't go. I can't go. I talk to myself, and turn to leave. I talk to myself and turn back to the line. I can't make myself go to the communion rail. I stumble out into the streets and I cry. A grown man with tears streaming down his face, tears that didn't fall that summer South down home.⁸²

It is clear that ontological grief leaves no aspect of one's life untouched or unturned in some manner—inclusive of the secular as well as the sacred, and even if it is forty years or longer before one allows its cancerous presence to be consciously known and dealt with. Raboteau later shares in his memoir his conversion from the long, family tradition of Roman Catholicism to that of Eastern Orthodox—an act he felt helped to reconcile him to his own past, inclusive of his religious heritage, his African roots, and his family, especially the father he never got to know.

It is ontological grief that causes Toni Morrison's protagonist in *The Bluest Eye*, eleven-year old Pecola Breedlove, to escape into a fantasy world of apparent no return in order to have blue eyes rather than embrace her innate identity and image in God. So great was her desire for *blue eyes* and all that the spiritual warfare of racism had made them to symbolize, she literally became obsessed, even possessed, by the yearning. Her yearning

⁸²Ibid., 17.

Additionally, ontological grief and the actions to ward against its perpetuation as well as to heal the causes of its manifestation are to be found in the piercing, penetrating, probing, protesting, and passionate poetry, playwriting, preaching, music, acting, dancing, and activism of persons such as Harriet Tubman, Claude McKay, August Wilson, Richard Allen, Ralph Ellison, Carter G. Woodson, Gwendolyn Brookes, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Langston Hughes, Lorraine Hansberry, Ida B. Wells, Claude McKay, James Weldon Johnson, Dorothy Height, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Randall Robinson, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Countee Cullen, Malcolm X, Maya Angelou, Marcus J. Garvey, Howard Thurman, James Cone, Roy D. Morrison, Marilyn Preston Killingham, Stevie Wonder, Jean Toomer, Septima Poinsetta Clarke, Arna Bontemps, Queen Mother Moore, Sterling Brown, Harry Belafonte, Debbie Allen, Sonia Sanchez, Amiri Baraka, Alvin Ailey, Fred Allen Swan, Ella Baker, Audre Lord, Larry Neal, Nikki Giovanni, Laini Mataka, Ntokze Shange, Benjamin Mays, H. Beecher Hicks, Jr., Nathan McCall, Sweet Honey and the Rock, Marian Wright Edelman, Alice Walker—just to name a very few.

Ontological grief is a real and devastating phenomenon in the midst of that which God has created *to be very good*. This insidious malady has been and remains a great human tragedy. It is in urgent need of being purged and its pervasive and widespread consequences completely healed. From the perspective of the spiritual warfare of racism, it is to be found, historically, in the ramifications of the accumulating conscious and unconscious damning of the Black soul, of the Black image, of the Black Being that gets internalized and then released and expressed as poor health in Black neighborhoods and communities; as Black-on-Black crime; as low income, high

unemployment, and high poverty rates. It is that wide gap and gulf that infringe upon relationships with one another such that they are separate, distant, and competitive rather than intimate, connected, and loving.

The researcher also validated and affirmed her own subjective experiences with the trauma legacy inherent in the spiritual warfare of racism and its formation of ontological grief. *Resurrection of An Image* supported the researcher to look at, feel, name, and define the grief resulting from loss after loss after loss of a community of people not knowing and, thus, not being the truth of themselves as a consequence of the failure to put into proper and transcending perspective the role that the spiritual warfare of racism and its subsequent oppressions have had and continue to have upon them. Ontological grief is confirmed most, however, by the knowing that to not love as God created and commands one and all to love automatically results in one's spirit, soul, heart, mind, and body—one's entire *Being*—grieving. For all need, want, and must have LOVE! In the next chapter, the theoretical and theological underpinnings for this ministry project model will illustrate why love is such an innate, human necessity.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW: UPON THIS TRUTH

The theoretical foundation for this ministry model is based on biblical, historical, and theological tenets and premises. In combination, they serve to render credence to why an endeavor such as *Resurrection of An Image* is so vitally needed in times such as these. They will now be presented and addressed respectively.

Biblical and Historical

The ministry model, *Resurrection of An Image*, is a testament to the researcher's biblical and historical faith that all that God has created, as indicated in Genesis, is, indeed, very good—including God's creation of both male and female in His image.¹ It is possible for the researcher to see, even now, a visual image of God looking around at His handiwork with satisfaction and pleasure. The fact that "God values and takes delight in all creatures is highlighted in the biblical assertion that not just humans, but all creatures are able in some way to give glory to God their creator."² As *beings* created and patterned in God's image—no matter how distorted this truth has become as evidenced by the wayward thoughts, actions, and deeds humans hold against each other and,

¹Genesis 1:26-31.

²Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 97.

subsequently, against God—this ministry project was established on the belief that the true essence of our Spirit nature remains intact and, ultimately, indestructible.

The ultimate evidence of human's innate, indestructible God nature is to be found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. While Jesus' death by crucifixion was ordained by God to save the world from sin so that humans, as God's creations, would have eternal life in God.³ Jesus' resurrection also evidences that who and what human beings are ontologically was not limited by, or even based on the physical or worldly. Jesus caused much perplexity for even the most scholarly amongst the Jews when He said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."⁴ The Jews thought Jesus was talking about a building that had taken forty-six years to build and therefore found it incredulous that Jesus would be able to raise it up in three days. Jesus, of course, was referencing His body as a temple, which was raised on the third day following His crucifixion.

Jesus' resurrection was a testament to spiritual power being greater and the victor over worldly, physical power. It was upon this biblical and spiritual *Truth* that *Resurrection of An Image* stood. It is the good news that, although African Americans, and others, have been subjected to the spiritual warfare of racism and its unrelenting efforts to desacralize, distort, and defame their image as a people, the truth about the African American image can and will continue to be raised up. The historical and cultural stories of African Americans are replete with these risings. Despite the most horrific of human actions taken to crush to earth that which God created, the black Being innately has the resiliency of Spirit to resurrect—just like the phoenix bird of Egyptian mythology

³John 3:16-17.

⁴John 2:19.

and, most of all, just like Jesus—because the image that fashioned African Americans, as it does all other people, “comes from God who is the Father of all truth.”⁵

While it is spiritually true that the imago *Dei* of African Americans has not been destroyed by the wiles of the spiritual warfare of racism, there have been many African Americans who have forgotten and even lost this spiritual Truth and instead have internalized the negative and inferior messages about their God-created image. The consequences of doing so have been pervasively devastating in every aspect and arena possible that bespeaks life. The spiritual warfare of racism—as it has been enacted in its multitudinous forms, given its name is Legion—has sought to reduce the African American or Black image and its true ontological essence to that of an object, a thing, an animal even, as enacted in the horrors of chattel slavery. The extent to which the spiritual warfare of racism’s “flaming arrows of evil”⁶ have been able to penetrate the psyches and souls of African Americans as its target and, thereby, to alter the spiritual knowing and understanding African Americans have of themselves, is also a direct measure of the extent to which ontological grief exists in their midst.

The issuance and expectancy of God’s creations to live by and fulfill the two foundational love commandments Jesus issued to love God, self, and others served as the theological impetus for the researcher’s ministry project. Both commandments undergird the motivation for the researcher identifying ontological grief as the biblical and historical problem she was greatly concerned about and committed to address and help heal in order to assist in the restoration of the beloved community here on earth, as it is in

⁵David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1953; reprint, Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, Out-of-Print Books on Demand, 1992), 11.

⁶Ephesians 6:16b.

heaven. The ministry model the researcher developed, like the aim of her peer focus group, was to transform communities where love's presence continues to be absent. Theoretically, *Resurrection of An Image* is founded on the biblical and historical position of the researcher that anything and everything that seeks to and actually does usurp God's divine plan and purpose for those whom God created to love Him and each other—no matter how tempered or temporary—is categorically spiritual warfare and is the primary, if not sole, culprit of ontological grief and the destruction of the beloved community.

The researcher posited that when God first created the human family, He too created the beloved community, biblically symbolized as the Garden of Eden. The first biblical reporting of spiritual warfare—and too, ontological grief—is found in Genesis when the serpent approaches Eve in the Garden and beguiles her to believe that there was something greater to be had—“to be like God, knowing good and evil”⁷—than that which God had already abundantly blessed and given to God's first two human creations. Once this untruth had whetted Eve's egoistic appetite and she in turn Adam's, the rest was the beginning history of ontological grief and the persistent attack against the beloved community. For once Adam and Eve disobeyed God's commandment and actually ate fruit from the tree forbidden to them, they also immediately experienced what the serpent was truthfully offering—spiritual warfare's evil in exchange for God's good.⁸ It was their acceptance of evil that made it necessary for them to hide from the goodness of God's presence. The knowing of their nakedness was the knowing of themselves as being

⁷Genesis 3:1-5.

⁸Genesis 3:6-24.

something different than that for which God created and purposed humanity *to be*: in direct, intimate, and loving relationship with God.

Historically, the spiritual warfare of racism was initially promulgated on the false biblical and theological tenets that African people were without souls and thus, not totally human—if human at all. This was but one of the many fallacies put forward by the perpetrators of the spiritual warfare of racism as justification for their own egregious deeds while many were blasphemously and ludicrously attempting to parade as Christians. Race has so effectively been used as a tool of spiritual warfare that it is accountable for the loss of billions of lives in some form or capacity. Race has been used to divide and categorize as well as to conquer, colonize, and control people based on a human stratification system never intended by God.

It must be acknowledged that much has changed and much progress has been made since the early 1400s when “Europeans sailing to and from West Africa initiated a trade in human slaves that eventually took root on American shores.”⁹ Despite desperate and unethical efforts to justify and biblically sanction the hierarchical classification and treatment of people according to race, scientific evidence continues to be brought forward to establish otherwise. Montagu, as one who has engaged extensive research on race, identifies this human-made notion and its unfortunate practices as the most dangerous myth ever put forth:

The gallery of *race concepts*... has no basis in scientific fact or in any other kind of demonstrable fact. These conceptions of *race* are compounded of impure wishful thinking and represent naught but muddled myth—the tragic myth of our tragic era. Tragic, because

⁹Clayborne Carson, Consultant, *Civil Rights Chronicle: The African-American Struggle for Freedom* (Lincoln, IL: Legacy Publishing, 2003), 4.

it is believed and made the basis for action, in one way or another, by so many people in our time.¹⁰

Tragic, indeed, has the fallacy of race been because after reading and hearing about, witnessing, and/or experiencing directly assiduous assaults going on for over 600 years against that which is supposed to be sacred and loved, it is tragically understandable how those who are the targets of such ungodly actions still today see themselves and believe themselves *to be* someone, even some *thing* other than who and how God has made all *to be*. It is tragically understandable why ontological grief is so pervasive, especially among those of African ancestry and descent, the ones most targeted and harmed by the spiritual warfare of racism.

The *Resurrection of An Image* ministry project was developed as a ministry of love, committed through the usage of poetry, ritual, and hospitality, to help heal the grief of and about the black Being that is still so prevalent within society, as documented research and the practical realities of millions upon millions of people's lives evidence daily. It was a ministry project that joined the many voices and actions of others who have known and who still affirm the Truth of our ontological existence as imaged and created by God—no matter how long or extensively this Truth has been masked and hidden by the spiritual warfare of racism and its idolatry. The relational distortions that occur within one's self as well as with others as a result of this masking was so well understood and so powerfully expressed in the poem, *We Wear the Mask*, by “the first Negro poet to win national recognition and full acceptance in America,”¹¹ Paul Laurence Dunbar:

¹⁰Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*, 4th ed. rev. (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Co., 1965), 34.

¹¹Paul Laurence Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask” in Abraham Chapman, ed., *Black Voices: An Anthology of Afro-American Literature* (New York, NY: The New American Library, 1968), 354.

We Wear the Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,-
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be overwise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To Thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh, the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask.¹²

We Wear the Mask is a poignant, poetic expression of ontological grief. The *mask* is worn because of *human guile*, human deceptiveness that conceals the Truth and results in loss of authentic relationship, a loss that is inherent in the spiritual warfare of racism. This loss causes a foundational and fundamental breach in relationships, not only with our Self and others, but also with God. This breach is the place where antagonisms, strife, and conflicts breed. And, because the innate need for love, nurturance, and healthy attachments are not met in this breach, it is also the place from which the ontologically wounded and grief stricken begin to seek another god, or other gods and images *that are of the world* in futile attempts to fill these seemingly empty, void and even ugly and objectionable places to replace, usually unconsciously, the one and only true living God who can satiate these ontological yearnings and needs.

In addition to the worldly pursuit of money, fame, power, and material possessions as the substitutes for God, the White human prototype has been offered

¹²Ibid., 355.

racially as the *image god* that African Americans and other non-Whites should pursue. It is in this breached state of perceived spiritual disconnection from God that African Americans have become nakedly vulnerable and susceptible to the wiles and wickedness of the spiritual warfare of racism, for they find themselves without *the full armor of God*¹³ needed to protect the Truth of their *beings*. Consequently, when they fall prey to the spiritual warfare of racism, the result has been the negation and rejection of their own image, only to covet the image of Whites that was but the same as their own—an image created in the image and likeness of God. It is in this painful, exaggerated and unnecessary state of image negation and rejection that the very *beings* of African Americans grieve for their beings grieve the loss of God's Truth about who they are.

The spiritual warfare of racism is heightened all the more as African Americans embrace a pseudo-image that is based on worldly values and standards imposed by limited and lost humanity. While there is but one human race created by God, the pseudo-science that has gone into the creation of the pseudo-images that haunt and harm all, is but a spiritual warfare tactic designed to refute the spiritual wisdom exhorted by Paul:

We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and there is only one God and Father, who is over us all and *in* us all and living through us all.¹⁴

The racial hierarchy imposed by spiritual warfare is antithetical to what is of significance and relevance to God. This value difference is so aptly illustrated in the many teachings imparted by Jesus—most especially to His disciples. In one instance, Jesus, upon hearing the disciples argue and vie for the position of greatest, calls a small

¹³Ephesians 6:11.

¹⁴Eph 4:4-6, (NLT).

child into their midst and with hierarchical paradox, silences them: “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest.”¹⁵ This same paradoxical teaching of greatest and least is seen again just prior to Jesus’ arrest leading shortly thereafter to His crucifixion:

And there arose a dispute among [the disciples] as to which one of them was regarded to be the greatest. And [Jesus] said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’ But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.’¹⁶

This pivotal biblical tenet of the least being the greatest stands in direct opposition to worldly standards for evaluating and determining one’s ontological value and status and clearly demarcates what is meant when we are scripturally admonished to be in the world but *not of the world*. Race, as used for the purpose of spiritual warfare is an *of the world* phenomenon that holds no spiritual merit or truth. The success of spiritual warfare’s unfortunate and devastating use of race must be attributed, in large measure, to its use of the beauty and blessing of diversity and difference created by God as means for distorted and evil purposes. The spiritual warfare of racism ceaselessly attempts to negate the paradox of commonality and oneness inherent even in that which God has created to visibly be different, especially among ethnic groups. Despite these attempts, ethnic

¹⁵Luke 9:46-48.

¹⁶Luke 22:24-27.

differences are never cause for denying our bond and connected as a human family as the following commentary corroborates:

The fact is that there are numerous differences between ethnic groups, and even regional segments of such groups, in many bodily traits.... Differences are not denied where they exist. What is denied is that they are biologically either great or significant enough to justify [people] in making them pretext for social discrimination of any kind.... But the facts make it abundantly clear that these differences constitute the proof of the fundamental unity of all [hu]mankind. The very nature of the variations provides the completest evidence of that truth, of the basic likeness in difference. It is therefore as unnecessary to minimize as it is falsely to maximize the significance of these differences.¹⁷

But yet, as is too well tragically known—from history past as well as history present—race and all the outward, as well as inward, differences that can be found, identified, and claimed in association with it, are given valuative legitimacy. Thus, rather than being able to appreciate the paradox of *E Pluribus Unum*, or one out of many, and admiring and positively utilizing the great diversity God has created amongst and within the people of God, humans have instead too often allowed these differences to be used in full-fledged spiritual warfare one against another. This has particularly been true for the spiritual warfare of racism. Knowing that “as a person thinks within himself, so [she or] he is,”¹⁸ the spiritual warfare of racism offers as *truth* an illogical and faulty premise. Since ontologically the truth about our nature as God so created it cannot be altered or destroyed except by God, spiritual warfare’s only entrée of hope is to attack and distort the human thought system so that wayward actions are bound to follow. No biblical citation or genre of literature more graphically symbolizes spiritual warfare’s deceptive

¹⁷Montagu, 13-15.

¹⁸Proverbs 23:7.

nature than the narrative that gives the exchange between the serpent and Eve, and eventually Adam, in the Garden of Eden as previously referenced.

There are always negative consequences to adhering to advice and being led into temptations that result in our taking actions that put us in contradiction with what God has created, ordered, and ordained. Returning to the first great tragic human story of temptation, Eve and Adam were beguiled by the fallacy the serpent put forth to her. As Fischer contends, “[a] fallacy is not merely an error itself but a way of falling into error. It consists in false reasoning, often from true factual premises so that false conclusions are generated.”¹⁹ Several of the things the serpent said were true. Their eyes were opened upon eating the fruit. They did get exposed to the knowledge of good and evil. They did not immediately die as a result of eating the fruit—only because of God’s grace and mercy, however. What the serpent intentionally failed to tell was of the grief that would befall them for their disobedience of God—someone they could never *become like* beyond what God had already created them *to be*; and, indeed, they could never *be* God. Eve fell into the serpent’s fallacy and so did Adam, hence, *The Fall*.

The fall of Adam and Eve evidences what happens to God’s creatures when they *fall away* from God’s truth, protection and love into the wiles, deceptions and evils of the enemy. It is this biblical story more than any others that theologians grapple with to put forth a coherent doctrine of sin that is plausible for Christianity. To this end, it is the position of Thomas and Wondra that,

The doctrine of sin is, in a way, the negative presupposition of the whole of Christian faith and theology. Apart from human estrangement from God, there would have been no need of

¹⁹David Hatckett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1970), xvii.

revelation, the history of salvation, church, or theology.... Genesis 3 does not use technical terms for sin but simply tells a story to explain how sin began, what it is, and how it works out. The central theme of the story is that sin is disobedience to the divine command, the desire to overstep the status of a creature and to become like God. But it includes other elements related to the sinner's situation: the sense that freedom has been limited, doubt about God's goodness, desire for what is to be gained by disobedience, concern to involve others in responsibility, shame over disobedience.²⁰

Adam and Eve received punishments from God for their disobedience, including being banished from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3: 8-24). Their disobedience resulted in a major loss, a loss that connoted a change in the relationship they formerly had with God. No longer were they able to commune as directly, as intimately, or as freely with God as they had previously done. No longer did they have access to the comforts, beauty, and bliss of the Garden—the beloved community. According to the *The Forgotten Books of Eden*, Adam and Eve experienced tremendous grief as a result of their estrangement from God and the Garden:

But Adam and Eve wept for having come out of the garden, their first abode. And, indeed, when Adam looked at his flesh, that was altered, he wept bitterly, he and Eve, over what they had done. ... And as they came to [the Cave of Treasures] Adam wept over himself and said to Eve, 'Look at this cave that is to be our prison in this world, and a place of punishment! What is it compared with the garden?... What is this overhanging ledge of rock to shelter us, compared with the mercy of the Lord that overshadowed us?' ... And Adam said to Eve, 'Look at thine eyes, and at mine, which afore beheld angels in heaven, praising; and they, too without ceasing. But now we do not see as we did: our eyes have become of flesh; they cannot see in like manner as they saw before. ...

²⁰Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 144-5.

What is our body today, compared to what it was in former days, when we dwelt in the garden?’²¹

This lament scenario clearly reiterates as well as answers the two questions posed by Jesus when he asks: “And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?”²² The serpent, symbolizing Satan and that which is evil, deceived Eve into believing that she could have a world much larger and far more wiser than what God had already provided, in fact, she fell into the fallacy that she and Adam could be like God if they ate of the Tree of Life even though God had commanded them not to. But, as the account given in *The Forgotten Books of Eden* progresses, their grief persists as a result of the loss of the nature of their soul, a soul that was, prior to their disobedience and subsequent estrangement from God, filled with the grace of a bright nature. Additionally, they also had hearts that were not turned towards earthly things. So great was their grief about their loss of relationship with God and the loss of their original nature, i.e., being, they literally grieved themselves to death and were only *resurrected* when God, out of mercy and love, sent His Word unto them:

Then Adam and Eve entered the cave, and stood praying.... And as they prayed, Adam raised his eyes, and saw the rock and the roof of the cave that covered him overhead, so that he could see neither heaven, nor God’s creatures. So he wept and smote heavily upon his breast until he dropped, and was as dead.... And Eve wept bitterly, and fell upon our father Adam; from her great sorrow. But God looked upon them; for they had killed themselves through great grief. But He would raise them and comfort them. He, therefore, sent His Word unto them; that they should stand and be raised forthwith.²³

²¹Rutherford H. Platt, ed. and J. Alden Brett, asst. ed., *The Forgotten Books of Eden in The Lost Books of the Bible and The Forgotten Books of Eden* (United States of America: World Bible Publishers, Inc., 1926, 1927), 5-7.

²²Mark 8: 36-37, (NLT).

²³ Platt, ed. and Brett, asst. ed., 7-8.

Just as this story depicts Adam and Eve being resurrected from their ontological grief by the word of God, those who suffer from ontological grief today—especially as it encompasses grief caused by the fallacies intrinsic to the spiritual warfare of racism—can only be resurrected by the truth of God’s word as well. The very beings of humans have been created for relationship and fellowship with God. Humans cannot reach actualization or meaningfully relate with each other until they, first and foremost, as the first and greatest commandment states, *be* in loving relationship with God with all their heart, soul, and mind.²⁴

The spiritual warfare of racism seeks to keep those that it targets estranged from a true and loving relationship that honors and is centered in I-Thou, a relationship that can only be experienced as Buber contends, with the whole being:

The *Thou* meets me through grace—it is not found by seeking. . . . The primary word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting. The relation to the *Thou* is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between *I* and *Thou*. The memory itself is transformed, as it plunges out of its isolation into the unity of the whole. No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between *I* and *Thou*.²⁵

Prior to the serpent beguiling Eve to have the aim of eating forbidden fruit so her eyes could be opened to know good and evil and to be like God, there was nothing intervening between God and His first creatures—not even nakedness. There was intimacy between them, including direct and immediate access and communication. All changed,

²⁴Matthew 22:37.

²⁵Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2nd ed. trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 11.

however, when Eve and Adam sought to be what they were not created for and thus could not be: God. The major sin of the spiritual warfare of racism—and spiritual warfare in general—is that its false ideology is put forward as if it is God. It is idolatrous and those who are its practitioners seek to elevate themselves *to be* more than who and how God created them *to be* by portraying and treating those whom racism targets as if they are less than and inferior to who and how God created them *to be*.

The social and institutional usage of minority to reference and label the identity of the group portrayed and treated as if inferior, although supposedly quantitatively based (there are fewer Blacks in the United States than there are Whites), primarily serves, ontologically, to reinforce the *less than quality* that the spiritual warfare of racism purports, as well as to maintain human hierarchy, where some are viewed and treated as more valuable than others. To call oneself a minority and/or to hear others label fellow sisters and brothers a minority can only reinforce a *less than* belief about who one or others are—whether consciously or unconsciously—especially when, as racism’s target, one has internalized the negative and devaluing messages that desacralize one’s image and, thus, one’s *Being* as the following poem by Waring Cuney illustrates. It is entitled, *No Images*:

She does not know
Her beauty,
She thinks her brown body
Has no glory.

If she could dance
Naked,
Under the palm trees
And see her image in the river
She would know.

But there are no palm trees
 On the street,
 And dishwater gives back no images.²⁶

It is the emphatic contention of the researcher that to label and call one's self something that God did not create His creations *to be* is blasphemous, just as the attempt to be in the image of that which God did not create one *to be* is idolatrous. The term minority is more than a misnomer, it is ontologically and theologically untrue for God did not create any human as a minority to be viewed or treated as *less than others* as the protagonist in Cuney's poem obviously experiences herself; nor did God create any as or to be a majority as *more than others*. The premise undergirding the Declaration of Independence that states that "we hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal"²⁷ is more than a philosophical stance; it is biblical exegesis! Both terms, *minority* usually stated to reference and define Blacks and other non-Whites, while majority, usually not stated but understood to reference and define Whites, are part of the arsenal of spiritual warfare to maintain enmity, division, and disconnection between all whom God has created as one. Although claimed as quantitative terms, minority, as well as its implied corollary, majority, are but used as yet another means to maintain racial hierarchy as imposed by the spiritual warfare of racism. They are terms so commonly and unconsciously used, especially minority, that most are unmindful of the ontological damage and grief they continue to inflict upon the spirits and souls of God's beloveds. Most have become insensitive to the fact that words, which proceeds from the tongue are biblically declared to hold the power of life and death,²⁸

²⁶Waring Cuney, "No Images" in Arna Bontemps, ed., *American Negro Poetry*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: The New American Library, 1968), 98-9.

²⁷Zinn, *A People's History*, 71.

²⁸Proverbs 18:21.

are also used by spiritual warfare to obtain its ultimate end: to assure that hate, in its many forms and guises, rather than love, is the force that drives the one human race that God has created, drives it even to the point of death.

The distorted and untrue relational positions established by the spiritual warfare of racism serve to intervene in humans' direct relation to God—to the *Thou*. Therefore, these distorted relational premises interfere with the connection and guidance all need from God in order to live and move and have one's whole being. Racism, in its unrelentingness, consumes the attention and time of those who perpetuate it as well as of those whom it is perpetuated against. It fosters an unnatural habitat for human relationships that results in poorly formed human attachments and, consequently, a multitude of relational losses that are grievous to all, whether known or acknowledged. It is this common, human connectedness that makes Paul's advice in his letter to the Ephesians, applicable to and needed by all today:

Since you have heard all about [Christ] and have learned the truth that is in Jesus, throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness—righteous, holy, and true. So put away all falsehood and 'tell your neighbor the truth' because we belong to each other.²⁹

What a utopic ideal for how human beings should and can be together!

Theological

It has been the insight, wisdom, discernment, prayers and breakthrough tenacities of those who have dared to see and believe in a new heaven and a new earth that *Resurrection of An Image* gets its theological vigor. Persons such as Richard Allen,

²⁹Ephesians 4:21-25, (NLT).

Daniel Payne, James Cone, Howard Thurman, Benjamin Mays, Martin Luther King, Jr. and many, many, other pioneers and prophets, have helped part the Red Sea on the spiritual warfare of racism so that those whom it targets can, indeed, enter into the Promised Land that assures and affirms their image and likeness to be made in that of God's—not distorted and desacralized as the former seeks to impose. As a historically oppressed people, African Americans have always maintained a fresh hunger for the reading, exegesis, and hermeneutical application of God's Word. The horrific realities of chattel slavery and a country that did not value, respect, or protect their personhood, instituted a fervent need within the African American community to eke out an existence that theologically defied the evils that befell them.

In his now classic theological treatise, *God of the Oppressed*, Cone identified the theologian to be a person responsible for being and fulfilling various roles: first and foremost, an exegete of Scripture and, simultaneously, of its meaning and significance for human existence; a prophet who must make clear God's stand and judgment against injustice; a teacher or instructor of the faith who is able to relate past struggles of Christians with relevance for the oppressed of today; a preacher who proclaims God's Word and delivers good news to the poor and oppressed about the truth of Jesus Christ as their Liberator; a philosopher who remains keenly observant of the alternative interpretations about the meaning of life and its inherent struggle in order to avoid dogmatism and to remain open to dialogue with other faiths.³⁰ From here, Cone proceeds to state:

In all roles the theologian is committed to that form of existence arising from Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. He knows that the death of the man on the tree has radical implications for those who

³⁰James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1975), 9.

are enslaved, lynched, and ghettoized in the name of God and country. In order to do theology from that standpoint, he must ask the right questions and then go to the right sources for the answers. The right questions are always related to the basic question: What has the gospel to do with the oppressed of the land and their struggle for liberation? Any theologian who fails to place that question at the center of his work has ignored the essence of the gospel.³¹

The theological premise that all God's creations are sacred and to be loved is, indeed, a radical posture relative to the spiritual warfare of racism. As Cone establishes, the theologian serves no real or functional purpose in the lives of those in need of hearing the good news, if that good news fail to inform and to encourage them to embrace the liberating power of Christ Jesus in their own lives. *Resurrection* shares the unconditional love inherent in the good news by treating all persons and people with dignity, respect and value. It is a ministry model founded on and propelled by the spirit of liberation theologians who remain committed to the truth of God's Word rather than be conformed by and to the status quo for convenience and comfort. Such complicity with the *unimaginative* continues to literally be deadly to our spirits, mind, and soul.

So bombarded has the Black community been with seemingly ceaseless negative images and views of their existence, that sometimes it becomes extremely difficult to see or imagine anything else. But yet these ancestors who have gone before, had to use their imaginations in order to begin to create a new possibility, a new hope totally opposite to that which was imposed by the spiritual warfare of racism. No doubt, it was imagination that led to the beginning of Black churches becoming a visible, rather than an invisible, institution. It was imagination that led to vision as well as to action in the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of which the researcher is a member. The incident

³¹Ibid.

that happened at St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia as far back as 1792 continues to have resounding and imaginative ramifications still today.

The account of this defining, historical moment is relayed in *Songs of Zion*:

...Allen, Absalom Jones, and the church's growing black contingency were ordered to seats at the back of a newly constructed gallery. When white trustees tried forcibly to remove Jones during prayers, the entire group 'went out of the church in a body.' The episode produced a wave of sympathy for the seceders, enabling them to raise the necessary funds and to commence building a church of their own. Allen, as 'the first proposer of the African church,' was selected to turn the first spade. 'Here,' he concluded, was the beginning and rise of the first African Church in America.³²

No doubt, it was the ability of Allen to imagine the church's possibility, which too symbolized, even more importantly, the ontological significance of their ability to worship God in spirit and in truth—a truth that extended and embraced the fullness of their humanity as well. *Resurrection of An Image*, as implemented, affirms the full humanity and value of all who participated. Imagination was used to render creative expression to the varying ways participants were validated, affirmed and loved as beings created in God's image and likeness.

In *My Soul is Anchored*, Hicks recognizes imagination as a valuable, even sacred, way of having the freedom to be in relationship with God as well as to be able to know one's self—beyond worldly stereotypes and labels—from the place of imagination. As he states, "Imagination is clearly linked to *image*—we are created in the image of God.... The miracle is that the same God who *imaged* you and me gave us the power to image and

³²James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 10.

imagine on our own.... Because of the imagination that God gives, I have a vision of things that never were and a re-vision of things as they may yet become.³³

The researcher did imagine. She imagined a ministry model that could use poetry, ritual and hospitality in a retreat setting to form caring, respectful, and loving relationships that would help address and heal the grief that haunts and hounds African Americans because of the unloving treatment and false teachings about their Beings. The researcher imagined the creation of a space that would allow love to be the predominant energy force that would support all who came with the opportunity to simply *just be*— to *just be* their truth without defense and without excuse while honoring and respecting the truth, need, and right of others to *just be* as well. The chapters that follow share the details of how the researcher, along with the research participants, imagined beyond the confines and limitations of the spiritual warfare of racism to reach the place of love that God, not only imagined them to be, but also created them to be in the very beginning.

³³ H. Beecher Hicks Jr., *My Soul is Anchored: A Preacher's Heritage in the Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 17-18.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

The researcher, in choosing her research design, was ultimately seeking a way to investigate more thoroughly the phenomenon she identified and defined as *ontological grief* as well as to establish ways in which to address it and help those suffering from it—whether consciously or unconsciously—to heal. The researcher, as an African American, opted to look at the phenomenon of ontological grief in the African American community with specific attention to the role and impact racism has had and continues to have in ontological grief's formation as well as in its perpetuation. As part of the design process, the researcher deemed it important to place both ontological grief and racism within the proper biblical, historical, and theological context. It was important to the researcher *to be* spiritually responsible for what she sought to create in the development and implementation of her ministry model. Consequently, she sought to understand both dynamics from the view of spiritual warfare, hence the term she uses to reference and define racism as the *spiritual warfare of racism*.

The usage of language that moved the researcher and, hopefully, others beyond the traditional racial rhetoric that typically keeps its conversants stuck in the muck and the mire of the problem rather than manifesting a solution, served as the impetus for the terminology of ontological grief as well as the spiritual warfare of racism. The researcher wanted language that constantly reminded her of the spiritual reality that our fight is not

against flesh and blood, but rather against evil and wickedness that seeks to rule and reign by distorting and usurping the power, love, and goodness of God.

In the design of her ministry project, the researcher also had interest in being able to utilize her gifts and skills of writing poetry, utilizing ritual, and extending hospitality to others as means of accomplishing the research end. To give guidance to the focus and structure of the project itself, the researcher asked herself the question: What do the researcher and other people who have been exposed to and/or are experiencing ontological grief need most, more than anything else? The answer clearly and immediately came forth: Love.

This query-answer process subsequently led to the central research question for the ministry project: What difference will it make to express love through the usage of poetry, ritual and hospitality to help heal the grief of and about the Black Being? A positive reframe of this question is: What difference will it make to express love through the usage of poetry, ritual, and hospitality to help resurrect the true image and essence of and about the Black Being? The researcher hypothesized that to use poetry, ritual and hospitality in combination to express love to African Americans in this manner and for this expressed purpose would produce results that are (1) positive in that participants would be supported/made to feel good about who they are); (2) self and other affirming in that participants would be helped to look at, see, feel and acknowledge the value of self and others; and, (3) gratifying in that participants would express receiving value and meaning from the experience.

The researcher, in the implementation of her ministry project, opted to use two distinctive, qualitative design models: heuristic and action research. These two qualitative

models were intentionally selected as they enabled the researcher to subjectively explore, discover, and learn more about the phenomenon of ontological grief. A qualitative research model allowed the researcher to look at this typology of grief within herself as well as within the ten participants included in the research of her ministry project. It was through the intense, in-depth, and inclusive examination of phenomena in people's lives as well as in nature afforded by qualitative research that the researcher was greatly aided in her research query and quest to better know and understand the significance of the grief that impacts the very nature and essence of African American lives, living, and, ultimately, our capacity for loving as well.

The researcher developed a three-phase design that was tremendously aided by the tools, techniques, and processes of the qualitative models she selected. Through the deep attentiveness of both heuristic and action research, the researcher came to better know the nature of ontological grief as gauged from the research conducted and collected throughout the ministry project. Consequently, the researcher determined that ontological grief is the hurt, pain and suffering one's *being* experiences when there is a loss of loving relationship with God, self, and others. It is the grievous anguish of our souls and spirits resulting from one's failure to know and act from the ground of one's Self, one's *Being* as love.

It is important to emphasize that the researcher selected the design of her research project not questioning whether ontological grief exists as a viable or even tangible phenomenon, but rather emphatically affirming its presence within society in general, and within the African American experience particularly. The researcher did so based on over five hundred years of culturally collective voices and data—voices and data that are

today, audible and written, as well as inaudible and unwritten, but nonetheless known (even if frequently denied). It is the culturally collective voices and data that render testimony to the legacy of trauma, mistreatment, pain, and *blues* of people of African ancestry (and others) that have been a historical part of this country's founding and, unfortunately, current day reality.

During the course of the ministry project, the researcher's need to peer with intensity and great depth into the dynamics of both ontological grief and the spiritual warfare of racism proved to be very demanding. It was, however, the largesse of qualitative research's ability to embrace the holistic nature of life and the totality of the human experience within it—including the historical¹—that made it a perfect match for the ministry design and research the researcher engaged. Qualitative research supported the ministry project design that included a chronological and historical exploration of what the research phenomenon ontological grief has meant for the researcher and the participants (as well as other African Americans) as they have sought *to be* within a social context institutionally—even constitutionally—structured around the spiritual warfare of racism.

The ministry project, *Resurrection of An Image*, was designed, most importantly, to identify and implement actions that could be used to help heal the spiritual and social malady of ontological grief so that the true image of the sufferers could emerge, i.e., resurrect. The use of qualitative research models aided the researcher's creativity and the usage of her gifts and talents as means of accomplishing this valuable end of healing. Qualitative research, according to Miles and Huberman, "is conducted through an

¹Matt B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 2^d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1994), 10.

intense and/or prolonged contact with a field or life situation... reflective of the everyday life of individuals, groups, societies, and organizations. The researcher's role is to gain a 'holistic' (systemic, encompassing, integrated) overview of the context under study: its logic, its arrangements, its explicit and implicit rules."²

The research design and qualitative models the researcher used successfully aided her investigation of the explicit and implicit rules inherent in the spiritual warfare of racism and the effect these rules of practice had and were having upon her *being* and the *being* of other African Americans. Additionally, the qualitative model enabled the researcher to collect data that, "with their emphasis on people's 'lived experience,' [was] fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings [they would each] place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives: their 'perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, presuppositions' ...and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them."³

The researcher's design approach became even more tailored during her Candidacy Review when she was directed to the design method of heuristic research. After obtaining and reading Moustakas' seminal work, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*, the researcher immediately understood and appreciated why she had been directed to it. The researcher also knew that this method of self-immersion, exploration, discovery, and illumination of a particular phenomenon or subject of interest was a perfect fit. The researcher had an immediate kindred connection and deep resonance with Moustakas' definition and description of heuristic research and

²Matt B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 2^d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1994), 6.

³Ibid., 10.

was extremely excited and grateful for the opportunity to use it as one of her research methodologies.

As a research model, the design of heuristic research allowed the researcher to be directly involved, not solely as an observer of what was happening in and to the lives of the participants, but also as an observer of herself as the phenomenon of interest, ontological grief, was studied. The entire process of heuristic research, from beginning to end, “involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery [as] the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning and inspiration.”⁴ It was the grief experiences the researcher had about the long history and the consequential devastations of African Americans being treated so unlovingly by others and also themselves that was the catalyst for the research focus of her ministry project. Heuristic research not only allowed, but required the researcher to fully immerse herself in the pain of her grief and investigate it until more insight was shed about its existence as she searched “introspectively, meditatively, and reflectively into its nature and meaning.”⁵ Indeed, the researcher’s *heuristic investigation* began at the very beginning of the Doctor of Ministry process, especially with the writing of her spiritual autobiography and the subsequent exploration of the intense and reactive emotions and memories that emerged—emotions and memories that have since been illuminated, explicated, and identified as *ontological grief*.

In an effort to better know and understand the impact and toll upon her *being* and existence as a result of the spiritual warfare of racism, the researcher’s focus

⁴Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1990), 11.

⁵Ibid.

was localized to these experiences. The new image and meanings that emerged as a result of her doing so became her continued research interest in, and subsequent focus on, ontological grief. It was because of the researcher's desire to include, as well as to expand, her research investigations beyond herself to the experiences of other African Americans, who also sought *to be* in a structurally racist society, that the researcher found utilizing a heuristic research design for the investigation of these data very helpful. This process entailed the researcher fully engaging the six phases of the heuristic process, which includes initial engagement; immersion into the topic and question; incubation; illumination; explication; and, culmination of the research into a creative synthesis.⁶

Etymologically, *heuristic* stems from the Greek word *heuriskein*, which means "to discover or to find."⁷ For the researcher, the heuristic model was a means that helped her discover and find ways to help address and bring healing to the deep core soul pain of ontological grief as she felt and witnessed its pervasive presence in African American communities. Heuristic research worked well for the researcher's use of poetry, ritual and hospitality as the heuristic processes incorporates the use of creativity and self-expression. Overall, the researcher found heuristic research to be a very in-depth and intense design model that, if engaged by the researcher with openness and trust of his/her own inner knowing that values the life experiences he/she has had, the results that will emerge from these six phases of the process are indeed rich, revelatory, and rewarding. This was definitely the experience of the researcher as her ministry project was implemented.

⁶Ibid., 27.

⁷Ibid., 9.

The action-oriented nature of the qualitative research design also enabled the researcher to connect meaning to her experiences and those of the ten other African Americans with whom the researcher formed co-researcher relationships. The phenomenon of ontological grief was investigated and pursued as well as the desire to heal and be free of its ramifications—ramifications that are antithetical to the true essence and nature of one's *beings*. In the opening chapter of *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, the authors, Greenwood and Levin, begin by saying, "Action research (AR) can help us build a better, freer society."⁸ This statement expressed well a goal the researcher desired and continues to desire for the ongoing implementation of her ministry project: to thwart the impact of the spiritual warfare of racism in order to help set free those made captive by it. This accomplishment will, indeed, result in "a better and freer society."

The tenets of action research are especially meaningful to the researcher because AR explores and examines relationships as they exist within society and, through the vehicle of research, seeks to create a democratized process that is seldom socially present or experienced in our systemically structured day-to-day ways of relating and *being*. Through a research design and process that allowed for cooperative and equitable relationships, all involved co-researchers were able to not just be engaged in the inquiry of seeking to better know and understand their experiences of *being* as African Americans, but were also able to put into action and practice solutions that counter

the negative ramifications of the spiritual warfare of racism—primarily the practices of

⁸Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1998), 3.

loving, honoring, and affirming the value of self and all others as beloved creations of God.

The democratized relational component of action research highlights another very important element incorporated into its design, which the researcher deemed invaluable to her research intent: praxis. According to McNiff et al,

To be action research, there must be praxis, which embodies practice. Praxis is informed, committed action that gives rise to knowledge as well as successful action. It is informed because other people's views and feelings are taken into account. It is committed and intentional in terms of values that have been examined and may be argued."⁹

The qualitative approach of action research and its many benefits has long been used and advocated for by Greenwood and Levin. They intentionally engaged an eleven year collaboration to produce their introductory book on action research which provides an epistemological agenda that, as they say, "issues a head-on challenge to the conventional academic social sciences on both epistemological and ethical grounds."¹⁰ It was action research's ability to democratically assist with the process needed to help bring about social transformation that endeared the researcher to it as a model as the following comments by Greenwood and Levin convey:

Our advocacy [for action research] rests on two distinct but related bases: democratic inclusion and social research quality. AR democratizes research processes through the inclusion of the local stakeholders as coresearchers. We also believe that AR can produce better research results than those arising from the professional expert social research models. And we see AR as central to the enactment of a commitment to democratic social transformation through social research.... AR aims to increase the ability of the involved community or organization members to

⁹Jean McNiff, Pamela Lomax and Jack Whitehead, *You and Your Action Research Project*, 2d ed. (New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003), 13.

¹⁰ Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, xi.

control their own destinies more effectively and to keep improving their capacity to do so.¹¹

The long history and legacy of African Americans being silenced, their voices not being seriously heard even when spoken, and the negation of the value and meaning of their lives and their life experiences made the democratic nature of action research extremely meaningful to the researcher. She opted for this research process being mindful of the fact that since the very beginning when Africans were undemocratically enslaved and brought to this country, democracy has remained a prayed-for and hoped-for ideal, while remaining a yet-to-be-actualized reality. Consequently, the researcher was constantly mindful throughout the implementation of her research project of the great need for the views and feelings of all participants, including the researcher, to be heard and validated. She was mindful that the desired democratic process had to be practiced, not just put forward as the rhetoric of an ideal. Action research, in its promotion of democratic dialogue and action, served as a facilitative means to this end.

Through the use of action research, the researcher was able to explore with co-researchers how the spiritual warfare of racism was enabled through the power relationships that were established and maintained within the society to assure that non-democracy, under the guise of democracy, would prevail. This was particularly significant as the research phenomenon, ontological grief, came to be better understood as it existed within the researcher and participants as well as within the African American community and the general society. Again, Greenwood and Levin is cited as they express well how fundamental examining and addressing power relationships are to action research:

¹¹Ibid, 3, 6.

Without an analysis of power relationships, AR is impossible.... AR explicitly seeks to disrupt existing power relationships for the purpose of democratizing society. It also instrumentally seeks to incorporate the great diversity of knowledge and experience of all society's members in the solution of collective problems. AR asserts that societies, because of authoritarianism, use only a tiny portion of their knowledge and capacities to confront important problems. The reasons for this are the desires of the few who currently control key resources to retain that control and the fundamental lack of respect that elites have for the capacities of nonelite members of society.¹²

In conclusion, the researcher found heuristic and action research to be complementary in their intentions and design and both were invaluable models in helping her to conduct her research. The fact that the values of equality and respect are inherent in the processes of action and heuristic research when implemented, made the researcher's choice to use each easy. The researcher used the qualitative designs of action and heuristic research to create a democratized setting that provided the usually denied opportunity for the co-research participants and the researcher to talk openly and honestly about the spiritual warfare of racism as it has been fostered and perpetuated against the very *beings* of African Americans for centuries. The models allowed in-depth, reflective examination to occur for each through the telling of their stories. It was through storytelling or, as the researcher prefers, life-telling, that each participant was able to delve deeply into his/her life story for discovery, elucidation, meaning making, and, ultimately, for some form of inner transformation. The models the researcher chose served well her creative use of poetry, ritual, and hospitality to research and put forth a ministry model that will, prayerfully, be used to help address and heal the grief of and about the Black *being*.

¹²Ibid., 88.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

The qualitative design models of action and heuristic research were instrumental in helping the researcher develop and implement a three-phase ministry project that involved the use of various methods, techniques, and processes to collect data from the ten participants who joined the researcher as co-researchers in the research study. The study's focus on exploring and illuminating the phenomenon the researcher identified as ontological grief by examining the meaning and impact of being an African American in a structurally racist society initially determined that the co-researchers chosen would be African American. Additional criteria for selection was based on the effort to have diverse representation by gender, age, education, profession, income, geographical location, and, of course, experience. The data collection methods and techniques included an introductory letter, a participant release form, demographic and personal data questionnaires, an interview guide, audio taped interviews, journaling, poetry, conversational feedback, and, a one-day retreat that, through the use of ritual, incorporated the use of aromatherapy, silence, music, food, affirmations, massage, and a labyrinth. Each phase and its various methods, techniques, and processes are now outlined and presented.

Phase One

The researcher began her field experience by conducting an individual interview with the ten participants who comprised her research project. Initially, they were each

given an introductory letter (Appendix A) to read that (1) described the focus and purpose of the research; (2) defined the term structural racism; (3) identified the role and expectations of them as participants; and, (4) stated how and why the data would be utilized once collected. After reading this introductory letter and given the opportunity to ask questions and/or provide comments and discussion for further clarification of the research and what was being asked of them, participants read and signed a Participant-Release Agreement (Appendix B) in which they gave written permission for their voluntary participation in the research study and the tape-recording of the various sessions in which they would participate, inclusive of individual and/or group. Next, participants completed a Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix C) that provided background data regarding their age, race/ethnicity, marital and parental status, religious affiliation, education, income, and other personally identifying data.

Once the preliminary logistics and details were completed, the researcher utilized The Interview Guide (Appendix D) that was developed to direct the course of the interview with each participant. The Interview Guide was constructed solely for the researcher to use as she engaged the participants in a chronological journey of their lives within their particular family and social context with a view and accounting of the role and impact structural racism had on their development and actualization. The Interview Guide was organized according to the following categories with the last category attentive to topics and issues that were broader in perspective and focus: (1) Pre-Conception to Birth; (2) Birth to Age Twelve (0-12); (3) Teenage Years (13-19); (4) Young Adulthood (20-35); (5) Adulthood (36-50); (6) Middle Age (50-65); (7) Eldership (65+); and, (8) Specialized Topics of Focus.

Each category had a variety of questions that aided the interview process. The age variations of the participants meant that not all categories were addressed by all participants—a fact that helped to account for the differences in the length of the interviews that ranged from 1.5 to three 3.5 hours (with the average being 2.75 hours). All participants, however, responded to the last category that focused on specialized topics. The researcher engaged each interview prayerfully as she sought to pay close attention to each participant and to listen and to see what was being said, as well as sometimes what was present but not necessarily visual or verbalized, however, indeed, felt. This phase of the research design paralleled the first two phases of heuristic research—initial engagement and immersion.

Phase Two

The second phase of the ministry project encompassed the latter four phases of heuristic research—incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. After completion of the audio taped interviews, the researcher had the privilege of again listening to and being with the depth of the rich information each participant shared about their lives and their life experiences. What became clear for the researcher is that the stories of the participants, although individualized and nuanced, were also the stories of African Americans as a collective, as well as about humanity as a whole: the quest, the query, the yearning, the struggle, the need, the desire *to be—to be* cared for and loved, *to be* validated and affirmed, *to be* in caring and just relationships with others, *to be* able to give expression to one's purpose for existence through the use of the gifts, skills, and

talents God has blessed and bestowed upon each, no matter the external, i.e., worldly, context, conditions and/or circumstances one has to confront and contend with.

The researcher, in re-listening to the ten participants' stories as they examined what it has meant for them *to be* African Americans living in a structurally racist society, became cognizant all the more of just how, as Martin Luther King, Jr. posits, "inescapable this network of mutuality"¹ really is amongst and between us. Although over five centuries beyond the beginning of the African slave trade, the participants' stories reveal how, still today, the ontological quest African Americans have in this country demands almost superhuman and, indeed, ceaseless courage. It is the type of courage aptly described by Paul Tillich:

The ethical question of the nature of courage leads inescapably to the ontological question of the nature of being.... The ontological question of the nature of being can be asked as the ethical question of the nature of courage. Courage can show us what being is, and being can show us what courage is.... Courage as a human act, as a matter of valuation, is an ethical concept. Courage as the universal and essential self-affirmation of one's being is an ontological concept. The courage to be is the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation.²

The researcher, in conducting the research of *Resurrection of An Image*, intentionally and intently listened to and heard the courage it took for each participant to affirm his/her existence in the midst of the element of the spiritual warfare of racism that conflicted with his/her essential self-affirmation. Another significant hearing was how, too often, this courage was not recognized, acknowledged, or appreciated by the

¹Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 290.

²Paul Tillich, *Courage to Be*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952), 2-3.

participants. The researcher heard the central theme of *this is just how it was/is* emerge as the longevity and pervasiveness of racism in our societal midst have frequently resulted in the acceptance and acquiescence of worldly status quo and the silencing of the many who are its victims as well as its perpetrators. The consequences of these actions have resulted in the purging, or least the deep burying, of the conscious quest and committed responsibility for building the beloved community, a beloved community for which we have all been created and called.

As the commonality of the participants' life stories touched the researcher's own, what emerged for the latter was the inclination to write a poem, a love poem, that would render a poetic narration of what the participants had experienced and shared. Thus, through intensive listening and prayer during the course of a three-month period encompassing the latter four stages of the heuristic research design (incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis), the researcher was inspirationally led to write a poem for each of the participants. The poems were written to acknowledge the ontological journey each engaged as they have sought, and often mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and even physically have fought in this society and culture *to be*, especially in the midst of structural racism or, again, the spiritual warfare of racism. They are poems written to encompass the participants' trials and tribulations, challenges, joys, excitements, and accomplishments with the ultimate intent of validating and affirming their true image in God and their essence as love.

The researcher sought to write poems that would tap into the collective conscious and unconscious, mutually inescapable experiences African Americans have had as targets of the spiritual warfare of racism. Additionally, the poems are written to address

and to, prayerfully, help aide the healing process of the yet unresolved grief, whether known or unknown, participants, and the researcher, still have of and about the Black Being as a consequence of the negative and pervasive ramifications of racism. Each of the ten poems were written to speak love to affirm the ontological existence of each co-research participant as well as all African Americans—in spite of the outer and inner elements that attempt to conflict with this foundational and fundamental truth that is both God-established and God-ordained.

The poems that manifested through the researcher were grounded, not only in the knowing of the historical and multigenerational trauma African Americans have been exposed to and have had to endure, but most importantly, in the origin of human existence in and because of God. Alan V. Ragland, an ordained minister, wrote:

It is essential for African-Americans to remember *who* we are and *whose* we are in our reestablishing of godly identity. The African-American church elders of earlier years of slavery and second-class citizenship often reminded themselves of their first-class status with God by singing that old hymn 'I Know I Am a Child of God.' African-Americans need to *reclaim* the God-given values and principles affirming us as a people, again declaring the characteristics that distinguish and bear witness to our relationship with God.³

The poems were additionally written out of the researcher's great desire to help heal the grief within African Americans that is based on a false image of their identity so that they can, as Ragland admonishes, reclaim, i.e., resurrect, their God-created image and know that the kingdom of God really does dwell within each. To this much-desired end, the researcher wrote additional poetry during Phase II while retrieving previously written poetry from her journals and archives that rendered expression and meaning

³Alan V. Ragland, "From Heaven to Hell: What Went Wrong in Egypt?," *Living in Hell: The Dilemma of African-American Survival*, eds. Mose Pleasure, Jr. and Fred C. Lofton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 42.

relevant to the ministry project. All of these particular poems were used during the course of the one-day retreat that took place in Phase Three.

Nine of the ten participants were available for the second phase of the ministry project that entailed the researcher again meeting individually with the participants to present and share the poem written by the researcher, especially for and about each one of them. A Post-Interview Follow-up Presentation Guide (Appendix E) was used for this session. Participants were given a recapitulation of the initial interview they participated in and the various categories, questions and specialized topics of focus covered. It was after this preview that the researcher used a technique that she has developed and entitled, *I Am Speaking to Your Spirit*. The researcher utilizes this method to serve several purposes: (1) to affirm and remind us that we are, in essence, Spirit, as God is Spirit and as God created us in God's own image and likeness; and, (2) to command the attention of the Spirit so that what was being affirmed could supercede the limiting, competitive, conflictual, and conditioned tendencies of our egos. Thus, it was in this *spirit* that the poetic presentation was set-up and shared.

After each poem was presented and participants had the opportunity to *just be* for a few minutes, the following lead questions were asked: "What are you feeling now that you have heard and received your poem? Did your poem speak to your Spirit, and, if so, how?" The dialogues that followed these questions were generated and determined by the responses of each participant. The participants were given what the researcher called *A Spirit Assignment* (Appendix E) that asked them to read their poems for the next seven (7) days, at least twice: once in the morning before getting busily engaged in their day and a second time at night, just prior to them retiring or going to bed. Also, they were

asked to read their poems in front of a mirror. The participants had the option of reading their poems to themselves as many times during the day as they desired, even without being in front of a mirror, but at least twice in front of a mirror in order to continue hearing and receiving their poem. A “Reflections Journal” (Appendix F) was provided and each participant was asked, at some point during the day and before going to bed, to write the reflections/thoughts/ feelings/desires each experienced as a result of continuing to read and to receive his/her poem. The main emphasis was on participants allowing their poems to keep speaking to their spirits as they reflected on their life experiences and journeys as African Americans who have been living and seeking *to be* in a structurally racist society where the spiritual warfare of racism is constantly waging and raging against them.

The second phase session was concluded with the participants completing a MY FAVORITES form (Appendix G) that aided the researcher in preparation for the third and final phase of the ministry project—a one-day retreat in the primary ministerial context, Taranga House Retreat & Practice Center, the researcher’s home located in Accokeek, Maryland. After outlining Phase III, the researcher will introduce the ten participants and their respective poems in the order the interviews were conducted. The participants’ responses to and feedback about their poems, both after initially hearing and receiving them and also after reading and journaling about them for several days, is provided in a document entitled, Feedback from Participants To and About Their Poems. (Appendix H). The additional poems included and used during Phase Three as aforementioned will follow the co-research participants’ poems.

Phase Three

The third phase of the ministry project entailed the researcher planning and implementing a one-day retreat for participants based on the research question and thrust of her ministerial project in which she desired to know: What difference would it make to express love through the use of poetry, ritual, and hospitality to help heal the grief of and about the black Being, particularly as perpetuated by the spiritual warfare of racism? The retreat was held at Taranga House Retreat & Practice Center in Accokeek, Maryland for eight (8) hours on a Saturday, from 10:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. Eight of the ten participants were in attendance. One participant (MC) had death in her family that required her to travel out of town for a funeral, which was held on the same day of the retreat; and, the other participant (CM) discontinued participation in the research study after the first phase reportedly due to employment scheduling conflicts.

The retreat was designed and implemented through the synergistic use of the researcher's gifts and talents of poetry, ritual, and hospitality. It was a retreat day planned to be, in essence, *a day of love*, and one well supported by the spirit and motto of Taranga House: The place to retreat and practice the essence of being love! The retreat was undergirded by the foundational scripture for Taranga House as well:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly [and sisterly] love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."⁴

⁴Rom12:9-13

The MY FAVORITES form completed by participants served as a guide to assist the researcher to practice hospitality by creating and implementing a retreat day in which the *being* of all participants present were validated, affirmed, honored, and loved. The researcher began by first preparing and cleansing the retreat setting and context, to visually and aesthetically express love and beauty. This was done in a conscientious and ritualistic manner through the utilization of (1) prayer as the space was prayed over and all the participants were prayed for; (2) aromatherapy (scented candles) for positive and pleasing olfactory stimulation; (3) soft, soothing music to help create a melodic and peaceful environment; and, (4) flowers to bring in nature as a reminder of the beauty of diversity, so aptly expressed in the varied colors, shapes, and genres of flowers found in nature as well as in a fresh bouquet. Food was also ritualistically prepared and served. The variety of foods included at least one of the foods each participant identified on his/her MY FAVORITES list. Breakfast food was ready and available upon the participants' entrance into Taranga House, while lunch was later catered and served.

Ritualizing the space of Taranga House was fundamentally important for the entire retreat experience. As ritual expert Malidoma Some says in *Ritual: Power, Healing and Community*:

The more ritualized our space, the more ritualized our lives. I am suggesting that a space (cultural space or community space) in which ritual is the yardstick by which life is measured puts the people living in it in a constant state of ritual energy that sanctifies their lives. A sacred life is a ritualized life, that is, one that draws constantly from the realm of the spiritual to handle even the smallest situation.⁵

⁵Malidoma Patrice Some, *Ritual: Power, Community and Healing* (Portland, OR: Swan/Raven & Company, 1993), 60.

Taranga House was used as a cultural and community space to conduct the retreat for the co-research participants. The researcher generously and intentionally extended hospitality to help make participants feel welcomed, comfortable, safe, and loved. The use of the various ritual modalities previously mentioned were integral to this endeavor. Throughout the retreat, the researcher remained intentional and committed to serving each participant in ways that sanctified and validated their lives and the ground of their *being* as created by and centered in God.

The researcher began the formal part of the retreat after breakfast (or rather brunch) with participants given the opportunity to introduce themselves as a participant/co-researcher and to share their personal motivations for being involved in the ministry research project. Once these powerful sharing's were complete, the researcher invited and asked the participants to enter into the sacredness of silence. All had been previously informed that the retreat would be one of silence—at least for a large portion of the day. Only the researcher talked as she utilized her developed technique of speaking-to-the-spirits of the co-researchers to lovingly share poetry, music, memories, and, to remind and affirm the truth of who the participants were: Love.

Once silence was fully realized, the researcher proceeded by using a meditation ritual to state the purpose and objectives of the overall ministry project as well as the retreat and to thank participants for the instrumental and invaluable role they played in accomplishing them. Throughout the retreat the researcher was solely focused on *being* hospitable as she served the participants in and with Love. The rest of the day's retreat went as follows:

The Sharing of Poetry – The researcher shared the additional poems she had written during the course of Phase II as well as

some that had been previously written but specific to the research topic and focus. Narration and music were sometimes used after the poetry in order to reinforce a message and to hone in on particular feelings and thoughts the poetry evoked as it focused on the African American quest *to be* in this country.

Live Music – A pianist and saxophonist played music just prior to and during lunch that included the favorite songs participants’ identified on their MY FAVORITES list. The music further enhanced the atmosphere of love and peace that was established from the onset as well as validated and affirmed all present.

Lunch – As previously mentioned, lunch was catered and served and included favorite foods of the participants. The menu consisted of crab cakes, fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, collards, cabbage, candied yams, cornbread, brownies, pound cake, and punch. Silence was broken for lunch in order to allow participants an opportunity to get to know each other better.

Massage – A professional massage therapist was brought in to give each participant the opportunity to receive a fifteen-minute head, shoulder, back and foot massage. While this part of the retreat took considerable time, it was beneficial to have the participants silently watch each other receive the love and care that was given as each person received a massage. It was yet another way of expressing love and affirming the co-researchers’ deservability of receiving all that is good, including massages.

Labyrinth – After each participant completed his/her massage, a portable labyrinth was in place for each to walk in silence and reflect on the journey and sacred path of his/her life. Most present had not experienced nor knew about the labyrinth and thus the researcher provided information about it and how it is used.

Gifts – The researcher presented each participant with a gift bag that included two professionally made copies of their poems. Each poem had on the front jacket cover the ministry project’s title, *Resurrection of An Image*, the title of his/her poem, and, an Adinkra symbol and its meaning especially selected by the researcher for the participant based on his/her character and personality. Adinkra symbols originated with the Akan people of Ghana, West Africa and reflect their “traditional mores and specific communal values, philosophical concepts, codes of conduct, and social standards. They are an expression of the Akan cosmology and have multilayered meanings as well as levels of interpretations.

They reflect Akan common wisdom relating to the notion of God, quality of human relations, the spirituality of life and the inevitability of death. Also, the symbols tend to represent uplifting, motivating and character building attributes of the individual.”⁶ It was specifically for this attar purpose that the researcher selected a different adinkra symbol for each participant and affixed to his/her poem. It was yet another way for the researcher to positively and lovingly validate and affirm the participants. Another gift that was given to each participant was the scripture/affirmation/saying identified by him/her as a favorite.

The researcher had them professionally made into three-by-five laminated magnets that included the following: (1) Life is for Living, Laughing, and Loving! (2) Live, Love, and *Be* Happy! (3) Glory to Allah, Most High, full of grace and mercy; He created all, including man. To man he gave a special place in his creation. (4) I will trust in the Lord and lean not on my own understanding and He will direct my path. (5) The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. (6) Divine Order: Not my will Lord, but Thy will be done. (7) For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (8) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (9) Plan your work & work your plan. (10) Treat others the way you want to be treated.

The Breaking of Silence: Participants Sharing Their Poems –

The silence was again broken as each participant shared his/her poem. This provided a unique opportunity for the group to hear and learn more intimate details about each other’s life experiences as African Americans and their own respective quests *to be*. Through the participants’ sharing of the poetic narration of their lives, they were also given a public opportunity to validate and affirm themselves as loving *beings*. The poetry sharing’s were very powerful, emotional, revelatory, moving, affirming, inspiring, cleansing, and healing for all present.

An Ontological Toast - The retreat day culminated with a non-alcoholic toast to the *being* of all present. The song, “You Are So Beautiful” was softly playing in the background as the participants were affirmed and acknowledged by the researcher as beautiful *beings* created by God, in God’s own image and likeness, whose ultimate purpose for existence is to love and to be loved. Each participant was given the opportunity to talk about their

⁶W. Bruce Willis, *Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra* (Washington, DC: The Pyramid Complex, 1998), 1.

experiences in the research and implementation of *Resurrection of An Image*. Participants' were gratefully thanked for their participation in the retreat and for their participation in the three phases of the research design. The day ended as it began: in, with, and for love.

Overall Data Analysis

Once the researcher collected data from the ten participants via individual interviews and the completion of a demographic questionnaire, the researcher spent approximately three months to engage the latter four phases of the heuristic research design: incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. It was the engagement of these four phases that aided the researcher in analyzing the data she had collected and to in determining what was implemented as the final phases of her ministry project. Data analyzed is presented according to these four phases that constitute the latter processes of heuristic research.

Incubation

The interviews with the ten participants helped to immerse the researcher even further into the exploration of her desire to better know and understand the ontological quest African Americans have had and continue to have within a society and a system structured and plagued by the spiritual warfare of racism. After being immersed in listening to, hearing, feeling, seeing and being with over twenty-seven hours of *lifetelling* by the research participants (the ten interviews averaged 2.75 hours each) about what and how this particular journey of *being* has been for each of them, a journey that spanned a gambit of experiences as well as emotions, the researcher entered an incubation period. It was during this process that the researcher just allowed all that she had experienced and

explored with the research participants to simmer, or to incubate inside her. While she continued to feel, think about, and reflect on the data and the experiences shared with the participants and also others relative to the research focus and concern, she did not seek to direct the course of the information at this time. Rather, she allowed “the inner tacit dimension [of all these experiences and data] to reach its full possibilities.”⁷ While she remained open and prayerful about what might manifest, the researcher utilized the time to retreat from the saturation that occurred during the initial engagement and immersion phases of her research design. Thus, instead of being engaged and immersed in the data, the researcher allowed opportunity for the data to engage and merge with her as she awaited further elucidation and illumination of the implicit and explicit meanings of all that had heretofore occurred.

Illumination

It was during the illumination phase that the themes and hunches about the research focus and data were either confirmed, modified by expansion and/or reduction, or eliminated altogether. A primary hunch the researcher had that the data confirmed is that the experience of BEING an African American in a structurally racist society does constitute a loss or losses with direct implications for, as well as ramifications upon, one’s *being*. The primary loss is the loss of not being related to (viewed and treated) in a positive, validating, affirming, and loving way. The social messages about whom and how Black people are in society have remained so persistently

⁷Moustakas, 28.

negative that Blacks in general have to consciously work at seeing and loving themselves as beautiful, valuable, worthy, and, most of all, an image of God.

Historically, a large percentage of messages that bombard all forms of media and communications in this country—television, radio, newspapers, theater, books, Internet, —fail to proclaim African Americans *to be* as David, in gratitude to God, declares himself *to be*: “I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.”⁸ The research data collected by the researcher revealed that the spiritual warfare of racism makes it extremely challenging for the African American soul *to know well* or even to remember this truth about his or her *being*. At least three of the ten participants in the research study reported a time period in their earlier lives when they wished they were White, or at least had White features. There was also the reporting of trying to be like Whites; trying to prove themselves to whites; and/or trying to be better than Whites. No matter the effort, the data revealed the sometimes, even frequent tendency to make Whites *be*—rather than the Truth that God Is!—the ontological yardstick by which the image and standards for *beingness* are measured.

What was illuminated most significantly for the researcher was that in taking account of all the life stores told—from the variedness of the experiences shared to the intensity of the emotions expressed—the common thread that linked all together was the human need to love and to be loved, i.e., to be validated and affirmed in our existence, in our *being* in ways that unequivocally counter ontological grief. This need was shown in the bafflement and perplexity of participants as they found it difficult to understand or account for the horrendous treatment Blacks have been exposed to, and

⁸Ps 139:14.

most frequently without proper redress or protection. This bafflement and perplexity are but yearnings for the right to be loved and to be rightly treated. This need was also shown as participants evidenced ways they have worked hard not to be consumed with hatred and anger themselves because of the inherent evils perpetuated against them and Black people as a collective by the spiritual warfare of racism. These efforts are indicative of our innate proclivity and need for love and not war, and, for peace and harmony rather than competition and conflict.

There were four other dominant themes that became clear to the researcher that can be best presented as dyads, for one did not show without the presence of the other. The first thematic dyad is silence and acquiescence; the second is resiliency and determination. These dyads are actually paradoxical, even antithetical in their nature and purpose—at least upon outward and literal appearance. The strife that inevitably exists between being silent and acquiescing to the status quo of and fighting against or at least not accepting things as they are based on the resiliency and determination of one's innate desire to merge, as DuBois contends, "[one's] double self into a better and truer self"⁹ depicts well the ontological tension inherent in racism that all participants, including the researcher—in some form or manner—have to grapple with as they too sought and seek *to be*. The fact that all of participants have exercised resiliency and determination—even when conditioned/forced to be silent and accepting of indignities and injustices, even as they have too frequently failed to recognize and acknowledge these positive attributes within themselves and also others—is a testament to what David's soul knew so well: that we really are, thanks to our Creator, indeed, "fearfully and wonderfully made."¹⁰

⁹DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

¹⁰ Ps 139:14.

Explication

The theme of silence, even more so than acquiescence, continued to present itself to the researcher for deeper understanding and explication. What happens to a soul, a *being* that is silenced? To a person whose presence is not legitimated or validated and their essence is thus silenced? What happens to one whose voice is repeatedly not heard? Does it take one to a place as silence did Maya Angelou, such that when you do return you come back knowing, as she did, “why the caged bird sings”?¹¹

The researcher had an experience during the project’s implementation that supports her to explicate the too common occurrence of one being silenced and unacknowledged when not viewed ontologically as valuable or important. The fact that the researcher noted the following experience to the extent that she did is a testament to how effectively the heuristic research model served to help the researcher immerse, illuminate and explicate the phenomenon of ontological grief everywhere she went and with all whom she engaged.

The researcher went to visit a friend whom she had not seen for some time. Upon arriving at the friend’s house and ringing the doorbell, there was a brief delay before the friend came to the door. When the friend eventually opened the door, she did so talking on the telephone. The fact that the friend was talking on the telephone did not bother or really matter to the researcher. What did matter and bother the researcher, however, is that the friend opened the door and kept talking without ever looking at or directly acknowledging the researcher’s presence. This non-connection made the researcher feel unseen by the friend as well as unacknowledged. The researcher

¹¹Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1969).

did not feel she had been given permission by the friend to enter her home and *be* since there had not yet been any direct communication or acknowledgement of each other's person or presence. This was true for the researcher even though the friend opened the door and stood aside for the researcher to enter. The researcher, being very conscious of this need to see and to be seen, kept looking at her friend for eye contact and acknowledgement of her presence. It did not happen, however, until the phone call ended some five minutes after the researcher's arrival.

Some could read this and say the researcher's response and thoughts are extreme and even more so, perhaps, unnecessary. But are they really? If one can only truly know one's self in relationship to and with another, what happens when that other person fails to stand or be in relation with you? Is not your own self-relation altered? To these ontological queries and others like them, the researcher contends and the data collected support this position, that a person's existence can be silenced—shut down, made not to matter, made to be insignificant, even made to be an object rather than a subject—when there is no genuine, authentic care, love, or connection between them. The researcher knows, or at least believes, that it was not her friend's intention to not acknowledge or silence her being for the temporary period that she did. The researcher thinks it was a very unconscious, although insensitive, action—an action that is far too prevalent in our society. Just imagine what it must be like and what must happen to a person whose *being* is not acknowledged, not greeted or welcomed, not allowed to have voice almost, if not actually, daily? And yet, these and other ways of silencing and ignoring a person's existence such that one begins to think and feel him or her self to be insignificant and devalued or, worst yet, in need of *being* different from how God has

created him or her has been the historical legacy of the African American community for centuries.

The researcher heard the deafening silence and lack of affirmation the participants experienced throughout the course of their lives in various contexts and capacities time and time again. The acquiescing comment, or a similar iteration, that surfaced most frequently in response to the silence was, “It’s just how things were and/or are.” The evidence of ontological grief surfaced as the democracy of the qualitative research process supported the commitment of all involved to go beyond the silence to hear what the soul, the spirit was saying. And, inevitably, this inner *being*—the spirit—was always speaking the desire, the need *to be* validated and affirmed in love through loving relationship with self and others, and, definitely, with God.

The data collected also showed how the search for relationship is not limited to individuals or groups, but also within the institutions and corporate structures that supposedly serve the highest good of society: churches, schools, jobs, social clubs, governmental entities, etc. Research participants, inevitably, shared memories of experiences they had in the work setting, in the community, and/or some aspect of a larger social setting that revealed the innate need for human connection and caring. Capps comments about this human need for connection to and acknowledgement from others, especially as we seek it from within larger systems and the human community:

Bureaucratic structures cause many to feel unappreciated and devalued as we search in vain for a face that takes notice and affirms our value and worth. Our consumer-oriented culture causes us to view the exterior world as a panorama of objects that are either disposable or constantly being devalued. Is it any wonder

that we experience ourselves and other persons as not less transient and no less subject to devaluation?¹²

The silence or non-affirmation of one's beings as a result of ontological grief is hurting, harming, and even killing its sufferers in various forms of poor esteem and health. Great is the need for all God's people to be seen, heard, and valued. The silence and, too often, the acquiescence that kept being presented to the researcher during the course of the data collection process with participants was a silence and an acquiescence that was not desired. It was the silence and acquiescence within a soul, a *being* that was unwittingly and unwantingly made to be quiet with its truth—a *being* and soul that is ready and very much in need of being heard. Engagement with the participants, as well as with her own experiences, confirmed for the researcher that even when one is at his or her loudest sometimes, the true Self can be silenced—anxiously waiting and very eager to be heard. Even when we project our pain out and onto others, or even turn it inwardly against ourselves, our true voice and words are yet to be spoken, heard, and heeded: We need and want Love.

Creative Synthesis

The researcher spent many days in solitude and prayer over and about the data she retrieved from the participants as well as from her own life experiences and journals. As the researcher focused on what the data revealed about the various themes that stood out—silence, acquiescence, resiliency, determination, connection, affirmation—it became abundantly clear to the researcher that all the themes expressed, whether viewed positively or negatively, were all about the need for love. The explicit as well as implicit

¹²Donald Capps, *Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 36.

messages were all about the soul's unyielding desires for love. The data corroborated the need to give and to show the participants, and also the researcher, love—as much as possible and in as many ways as possible. Out of the yearning and need for healing, the researcher wanted to give back to the participants—through the poems, the retreat, and other means and methods—the positive and life-affirming characteristics she heard and saw in them, even in the midst of the deafening silence, the searing pain, and the gripping grief of the spiritual warfare of racism.

The researcher was driven by the desire to acknowledge the hurts, the pains, the mistreatments, the injustices, the inequalities, and the right to righteous indignation that the participants all had in some form or manner. The researcher wanted to provide a forum conducive for the participants' voices to be heard and validated in order to help end the deadly silence many carried within them. It was the long legacy of silence germane to the African American community that continued to be passed on. It showed up in the participants as they had too often not given themselves, nor had the culture of the society given them permission, to speak about the depth of the grief caused by the silencing and failed acknowledgement of their true beings and that of other African Americans. The researcher heard the deafening silence of souls that, unfortunately, knew well the horrors that can be imposed by the spiritual warfare of racism—horrors too horrific sometimes to even talk about.

The ultimate purpose of the poems the researcher wrote for each of the ten participants were to express love and to speak love into the participants' grief for healing and to remind them, the researcher and all others who perchance read them that, as *beings* created by God who is love, our first, foremost, and sole purpose on earth, in all that we

say and do, is to love and to be loved. The poems were written to help break the deadly silence of ontological grief and to defeat the devastations of the spiritual warfare of racism with the redemptive and resurrecting power of God's love. Consequently, throughout the research experience, the researcher wanted the participants to experience themselves to the fullest loving capacity possible. While a lofty goal, the researcher knew well in her soul that true love, agape love, could indeed reach that high. It was with this knowing clear in the researcher's heart and mind that she set forth to create a retreat day of love for the participants as expressed through the usage of poetry, ritual, and hospitality.

The retreat was another way to bring creative synthesis to all the research data the researcher had received and experienced with the participants. It was a way to come together in community and fellowship to see, hear, and feel each other's presence in a space that was ritualized and prepared with love. It was the presence of reflection, contemplation, laughter, tears, hugs, and the heartfelt and repeated verbal expressions of appreciation and thank you by all eight participants in attendance at the retreat that the researcher knows that the desired goal was accomplished. It was also the deep feeling of gratitude the researcher experienced in her being as she thanked God for the opportunity the research experience provided her to serve others in, with, and for love.

Participants and Poetry

Participant #1—RN

RN is a 67 year-old male who is married and the father of two children, ages 42 and 37. His initial entry into the world took place at his family's home in Bluefield, West

Virginia. He was the first born of six children. He grew up not knowing his biological father, however, he did have a stepfather as his mother remarried when he was around the age of two. He recounts that neither his mother nor his stepfather was openly affectionate. Their focus was primarily on providing for the tangible needs of the family, and under the social, economic, and racial strains in which they had to do so, there was usually very little time, energy and/or interest left for much else.

RN recounts a childhood that was not easy for a young, African American boy who loved and wanted to learn, but found his efforts unknowingly sequestered by a racialized and classified structure that did not affirm or support him doing so. He was very inquisitive and, although constantly seeking and exploring, too often, answers and revelations were not forthcoming from those whom he asked or even from that which he witnessed and experienced. Even more so, his queries were not always welcomed or appreciated for his probing threatened to pierce the *Veil* identified and described metaphorically by W. E. B. DuBois to capture the experience of *being* and living in a racist society as, in the vernacular of his day, *a Negro*. DuBois writes:

I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing.... In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting cards... and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows.¹³

¹³W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1st ed. 1903, 1989), 2.

As a consequence of this racialized Veil that has persisted in hiding the true nature, essence and purpose of humankind as so created by God, RN learned at an early age to go inward with his thoughts and feelings. He learned to manage as best he could on his own as he was socially conditioned *to be* without disturbing or irritating others, at least as little as possible. In actuality, he too had been concealed and contained within the shadow of the Veil, the ontological Veil spun, woven and hung by the spiritual warfare of racism, warfare that hides the truth about self and others as a consequence of the failure to love, validate and affirm one's identity as creations and children of God. Consequently, RN developmentally, like millions of other innocent and unsuspecting children, grew up cloaked within the Veil—the Veil that symbolizes just how unloving the spiritual warfare of racism is and how it creates and pervasively perpetuates ontological grief.

RN recounted a very unloving experience he had when he was around ten or eleven years old that necessitated him walking by a parked bus filled with White children. As he did so, each one who was near enough to the outer window and could, spat on him. When the researcher asked the questions, “What did you do?” and, “Whom did you tell?” RN replied, “Nothing, I just kept walking and I didn’t tell anyone.” His reasoning for both was that he had already seen and knew (although at that age he did not understand) that nothing could or would be done about the incident, and also that his parents were themselves powerless to help him do anything about what happened. So his conditioned and resigned response within the Veil was, “Why bother.” Yes, he, like so many others, kept walking while inwardly carrying with him the shock, the hurt, the shame, the pain, the humiliation, the righteous indignation, the desire for retaliation and vindication, the anger, the rage, i.e., the ontological grief.

Perplexed and pained, RN wondered, “What had he done to deserve such treatment, and especially from children who, too, should have, at that age, been innocent and loving or, at the least, friendly, even if cautiously so? But yet, the hounds of racism assured that they were as entrapped and bound as he and others were in a racist and unloving system that determined and dictated their actions to be targeted one against another, rather than one with another. These socially and racially controlled actions left RN isolated, separated and, indeed, segregated, not just externally, but internally as well as the racist social structure he was in did not allow a full integration or affirmation of his being, and he had not yet learned how to do so for himself. RN was learning, quite painfully though, what Howard Thurman realized and penned: “There are few things more devastating than to have it burned into you that you do not count and that no provisions are made for the literal protection of your person.”¹⁴

Another childhood story RN shared that highlights racism’s devastating toll on innocent minds, hearts, and souls encompassed his desire to go to the then so-called public library for he loved reading; he loved learning. However, unfortunately and what should always be considered humanely criminal, he was not allowed to go, because what should have been rights for everyone—like many other unalienable rights—had been reduced to a single privilege *for Whites only*. Again, the structure of racism caused RN to be perplexed as a child and to ponder later in his adult life, as did Samuel DeWitt Proctor in his faith memoir, *The Substance of Things Hoped For*, “Who can measure the

¹⁴Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 39.

extent to which oppression affects cognitive ability? Who knows the extent which racism effects one's self-concept and, thus performance?"¹⁵

While the answers to these queries remain incalculable, there is cause to give testimony about and to celebrate *the good news* of how resilient and transcendent are the inner capacities God has created humans *to be*. For despite spiritual warfare's longevity and legacy, as well as its direct impact on his life personally, RN has been able to excel in his career in information technology where he worked at local, national and international levels until his retirement in 1997 at the age of fifty-eight. He was blessed to do so even after being denied the opportunity for an interview when he first sought to make entry into the information technology field and the interviewer, upon coming out and seeing that he was African American, just turned around without saying a word to him and walked away. RN engages many activities and hobbies, as he is multiply talented and skilled to include in construction and music. He is trained as a classical guitarist and considers himself *to be a blues man*. The researcher now presents RN's poem.

A Soul Searcher Who Loves

In the beginning, I simply didn't have the right image I needed in order *to be*. Instead, I received socially racialized and negative Messages forced upon me. That were antithetical and quite contrary to who and why I really am. As an innocent, inquisitive young boy I could not conceptualize, nor could I comprehend Why there were those, so viciously opposed, to me growing and knowing according to God's plan.

Opportunities for intellectual stimulation and development systemically suppressed. As the outer world surrounding me did not want, much less expect, me to be or to do my best. Even the

¹⁵Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African-American Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995), 183.

basic rights to use the library and receive a decent school education were to millions and to me denied, As the crushing weight of racism's pathology relentlessly made it difficult to have a sense of self worth and esteem, much less ethnic and cultural pride.

But yet, despite structural racism I, paradoxically, have been made strong in the midst of all the wrongs committed against my ancestors, my parents and siblings and yes, too, again, me. Somehow, in some way, I have not succumbed or let the rhetoric of racism totally sway me or slay me or stop me from knowing I was born to be free. And thus, as I have experienced the social pain and the racial grief, I somehow and in someway willed myself to hold on to the inner belief that I could, I would, and, I did.

I did excel. I did achieve. I did exercise the multiple gifts, skills, and talents God Blessedly bestowed upon me. I did despite being spat upon literally as well as symbolically time and time again. Because what my persecutors didn't and don't know. Is that the saliva they spewed in ignorance and hatred has instead been positively used, Becoming part of the waters that have helped to fertilize the soil of my soul, Nurturing and sustaining me as I became all the more determined to grow

Into the image and likeness God made me to be—Not the one racism tries to make me see by first attempting to disguise, confound and contort And then to defame, desacralize and distort my essence.

And it has been through all of this that I have mentally, emotionally and physically strove —Day in and day out—to reach out and hold on to the greatest of possibilities while obtaining the loftiest of goals, Irrespective of what I've been made to experience, irrespective of what I've been shown and told. Ceaselessly propelling myself to newer and higher heights, working to manifest a vision others could not see, not even in hindsight. It has been the momentum of this determination that has propelled me from the local, state, national to international levels where I, though initially worldly naïve, Have been blessed to accomplish and even masterfully achieve—Peace.

The peace of knowing that I can and do choose to use all of my abilities for the good of my family and also humankind; The peace of knowing that not even the externally powerful forces of systemic racism can permanently alter, take or re-make what is internally and divinely mine.

Which is why I now realize that I have indeed been blessed to become who and how and what I am: modern day, can't be, won't be stopped, soul-searching Renaissance man.

Yes, that's right! This is who I am: A loving, kind, caring, studious, honorable, multi-talented, multi-skilled man who is a soul searcher—a soul that searches for Truth. Despite centuries and centuries of systemically structured racism, I have managed to search beyond the *isms and schisms*, as well as the divisions and dissensions to find the Truth that resides within me because I, I search Truth out until, until my soul is satisfied and no longer am I haunted or taunted by someone else's false images and illusions. I search Truth out until, until I can sort through and discern inner tranquility from outer confusions. I search Truth out until, until my mind is renewed, restored and ultimately at rest. I search Truth out until, until, until I give and be my best.

And as I have searched my soul for Truth from centuries before, I have finally come to know that my core, my essence is centered in Love and therefore, No matter how sophisticated the weapons are that are formed against me, they shall never prosper, nor make me less when I am indeed more. Why? Because I, I am love. I am love and, therefore, I love even in the midst of lovelessness. I am love and I love even in the midst of racism's sickness.

And this is why, at the end of each day, I can lay down with a song in my heart and a smile on my lips and say, "Thank You, God, for being Love and for creating me in Love so that I can keep finding my way through the spiritual warfare of racism to know that I am a modern day, can't be, won't be stopped, soul-searching enaissance man who loves. Yes, that's right! For I, I am, indeed, Love.

Participant #2—JN

JN is a sixty-five year-old female who was born two months premature at her family's home in West Virginia. She weighed four pounds at birth and was able to thrive without medical intervention as Blacks during the era of her birth were usually denied access to medical care and treatment due to the spiritual warfare of racism. JN tenderly tells the story of how she was laid in a shoebox and then placed by a heater in order to be

kept warm and, no doubt, alive. JN was an only child for seventeen years until a brother was born. She spent the first three years of her life primarily living with a paternal aunt and uncle whom she became very attached to during this significant developmental stage of her life, especially her aunt. Time was spent with her parents as well, but mostly on the weekends. It was because both of her parents worked and her aunt did not that her aunt had the primary responsibility for her care and upbringing initially.

JN grew up loved, sheltered, protected, and provided for, the latter in ways that many people of color during that period did not have the opportunities or resources to be able to do. She was always well-dressed by both her mother and her aunt. Her mother is described as having been very meticulous and she would wash and iron JN's clothes to assure that she always looked good and was well presented when in public. JN also described her mother as *a fantastic cook* who made meals that were *delicious*. As a family, they always celebrated birthdays and Christmas was, indeed, *a big thing*. Her mother did domestic work for a period of time until she discontinued working outside the home altogether.

The relationship between JN and her mother was somewhat strained during her earlier years because of JN being, as she described, "totally attached to her aunt." She also described her aunt to be much more openly affectionate than her mother. JN even used to think her mother did not really love her since she was not emotionally affectionate. It was from her aunt that JN received the majority of her hugs and kisses and positive self-esteem and image building. Her mother was much more practical as her focus was on assuring that JN had all she needed for school and various other activities. JN expressed gratitude that she had the opportunity to develop a closer relationship with her mother

prior to her mother's death at the age of seventy-nine. She also came to realize that her mother did love her and just expressed her love in more practical ways (meals, clothes, hair, etc.) than did her aunt. Additionally, she came to understand that her mother was not shown open affection by her mother either (JN's maternal grandmother) and thus her mother did not learn how to do so.

JN's father worked in the coalmines of West Virginia and although it was a very hard, demanding, and even dangerous job, he faithfully went to work Monday through Friday as providing for his family was an important value and responsibility for him. JN reported that another faithful ritual he kept was to drink himself into oblivion once he got off work on Friday until Sunday afternoon/evening when he would begin to sober up in order to return to work on Monday and remain sober until Friday returned. JN described her father as a totally functioning alcoholic who was a good, kind, very smart and good-looking man and one who had to be really pushed to blow-up. JN was close to her father and felt very loved by him. She believes much of his drinking was attributable to the fact that he continued to grieve the death of his mother who died as a result of a stroke when in her thirties and he was only twelve. JN's father died at the age of 82 as a result of a collapsed lung. He had suffered several strokes prior to his death as well.

JN reported growing up in the midst of racism and segregation in a way and at a time when *everybody knew their places*. She attended all Black schools throughout her educational life, including college, as well as a black Baptist church. She used to attend a four-room school with a potbelly stove that served as the only means of heat when cold. The school was located on the same grounds as the family church and she and other

Black children had to walk to school (although JN's parents did get a car at one point and she was then often driven to school). She recalled walking to school and passing by the large school with central heat designated for White children and wondering why, as have millions upon billions, "Why the discrepancies?" Although JN, nor her fellow classmates, could comprehend at the time the educational as well as ontological impact the discrepancies were having on them and millions of others developmentally, it was finally recognized by the Supreme Court in 1954 with the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Quite significantly, then Chief Justice Earl Warren, in a stated opinion, broke with the long spiritual warfare of racism tradition and unanimously overruled the *separate but equal* doctrine of *Plessey versus Ferguson*. Warren stated that,

The segregation of black school children from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be done."¹⁶

Despite the hardships and inequities imposed by the spiritual warfare of racism, JN did well in school. She was, and still is, an avid reader (although her school did not have a library until she was in junior high and high school). She is also very gifted in math, which is what her career field has been for the past thirty-seven years, the last twenty-five with the government where her current position is a senior information specialist.

Because she was so protected by her family, JN did not have to knowingly deal directly with the negativities of racism. She stated her battle was mostly fought against others viewing her as being *privileged*—a view, nonetheless, imposed by the spiritual

¹⁶Clayborne Carson, consultant, *Civil Rights Chronicle: The African American Struggle for Freedom*, with a foreword by Myrlie Evers-Williams (Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International, Ltd., 2003), 122.

warfare of racism's limiting and confining definitions of what Blacks *could* as well as *should not* be socially or have financially and materialistically. JN's parents and her paternal aunt and uncle were able to provide for her and she did, reportedly, "seemingly had a lot materially," especially in comparison to most Blacks she went to school with, many of whom during this period were born into and/or forced into poverty due to the social, political, and economic injustices of the spiritual warfare of racism.

JN's aunt was always reluctant to let her do certain things. She was taught not to take chances and to be cautious and careful in life. JN believes this was a direct result of her family's attempt to protect her from the vicious realities of the spiritual warfare of racism that haunted and harmed the lives of so many, including in the small town in which she was born and reared. Additionally, JN feels these ontological restrictions resulted in her being given the message at an early age that she was not able to handle anger, rage or other intense emotions. Consequently, she feels these same messages have also persisted into her adult life.

JN cited a situation that happened to her on her current job that left her feeling uncomfortable, yet more aware of just how the spiritual warfare of racism attempts to re-define the Black image and divide Blacks by placing them into categories typically based on definitions and characterizations imposed by Whites. One day, a White co-worker was making stereotypical, racist comments about Blacks. Once she became aware of JN's presence, she quickly retorted to her, "Oh, but you're different, you're not one of them." JN stated she never did make a comeback to the comment but was left feeling she should have. In sharing the story, JN sadly and angrily stated, "I am not an anomaly."

The implication inherent in the co-worker's comment is that JN is "an exception" to the common stereotyped and biased *norm* that distortedly portrays who and how Blacks are characteristically viewed and treated—usually caricatured and negative—within the detrimental ontological framework established by the spiritual warfare of racism. As Whites who buy into this false and intentionally destructive human schemata inevitably encounter Blacks who defy these artificially and superciliously imposed racist norms, e.g., in intelligence, confidence, competence, character, compartment, etc., their immediate response, usually, in order to not confront or challenge their own role in perpetuating spiritual warfare through racism, is to place *these Blacks* in yet another category, the category of *different*. For Whites, this *different* is usually never meant to imply *different like us*, i.e., Whites, but rather just *different, unlike the rest of them*, i.e., unlike the negatively stereotyped and supposed typical Black whom some Whites need to believe is real. Indeed, if one is vulnerable to such a dichotomously limiting, pseudo-analysis made to negatively target some of those whom God has "fearfully and wonderfully made,"¹⁷ it is understandable how it can lead one to either refute being an anomaly as did JN or, to desire to be an anomaly as did Lawrence Mungin.

As a lawyer seeking partnership in a major law firm, Mungin had always been a person who had methodically orchestrated his entire life to *not be like them*, the negatively viewed and stereotyped Blacks. From the intentional selection of the school he attended (Harvard) to the conscious choice of where he lived (a predominantly white neighborhood), Mungin sought *to be a black anomaly* in the eyes and minds of Whites. He ceaselessly sought to strategically distance himself as far as he could culturally and

¹⁷Ps 139:14a.

geographically from Blacks and the Black community—including his own family. He sought to transcend race, not based on spiritual truths and principles, but rather because of trying to overcome the negative images and beliefs he had internalized about *being Black* that come par and parcel with the spiritual warfare of racism. As the following excerpt from his story in *The Good Black* shows, his efforts were futile as he ended up filing a racial discrimination lawsuit against his White employer:

Something clearly went wrong with Larry Mungin's career at Katten Muchin. He arrived as an experienced associate with two Harvard degrees and an impressive personal history that began in inner-city New York. He ended up marginalized, assigned inappropriately basic work, brushed off by senior partners, told he had 'fallen between the cracks.'... The case captivated lawyers from Chicago to New York and made headlines in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and other publications.... But in a society where race permeates so much of our thinking and subtly colors so many actions, Mungin's race could not be ignored. Katten Muchin didn't ignore it. The question is what role did it play? How is it that someone with so much promise—who was raised specifically to vault over the race line, and had the skills to make it—ended up instead accusing his employer, and, by extension, 'the system,' of harming him because of his race?... Mungin felt doubly burned at Katten Muchin. He had defined himself largely in terms of professional success. The law firm crushed that self-image by making him feel like a failure. Worse, he walked away feeling foolish that for his whole life, he had 'gone the extra mile to show people—whites and blacks, but mostly whites—that I wasn't one of *those* blacks, one of the dangerous ones, the bad ones. Or one of the complainers, the ones demanding special treatment.' Mungin had assumed that to get ahead, he needed to distinguish himself from the negative stereotypes of inner-city African American men. By the time of his lawsuit, he was no longer proud of all the time and energy he had spent reassuring whites. 'To be honest,' he confessed, with a self-deprecating bite to his words, 'I wanted to show that I was like white people: 'Don't be afraid. I'm one of the *good* blacks.'" But that hadn't been enough.¹⁸

¹⁸Paul M. Barrett, *Good Black: A True Story of Race in America* (New York, NY: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1999), 3-6.

Mungin's story is the story of the many Blacks who, in seeking *to be different*—different from how God has created and imaged them *to be* and, instead, seek *to be an anomaly* in the image of Whites based on the destructive and deadly untruths of the spiritual warfare of racism—find that they lose their souls. For the loss of our souls—the loss of knowing and existing from the essence of our *being* as God has so created us—is a, if not the, distinguishing mark of ontological grief. The impetus of *Resurrection of An Image* was and is to convey to the co-research participants, including the researcher, and all others in every possible way the spiritually and ontologically freeing message Jesus brought to the world of God's unconditional and redemptive love for all His creations.

JN reported that, as a consequence of the interview with the researcher, she was encouraged and supported to *open up* to dialogue, most importantly, within herself that has resulted in her really looking in-depth at how she has been being as an African American in a structurally racist society. She came to realize that she too had been expending a lot of thought and energy on how to prove herself *to be* just as good or better than Whites. She states that now, however, she realizes that she does not have to prove anything to anyone, including to herself, but rather, her need is to learn how to simply *just be* as God has created her *to be*. As a wife and mother of two sons, ages forty-two and thirty-seven, and the grandmother of a three year old, JN deems *being* the truth of her God created image and identity is a most worthy and valuable endeavor. The researcher now presents JN's poem.

The Love that Love Grew

A delicate flower I was from the beginning and I am now too,
Born into a land where too many were remote, distant, foreign to
love. But nonetheless I grew and grew for that is what I came here
to do: Love.

Born two months premature and a mere four pounds, At home
thout medical advice or assistance around For there was no price
my parents could pay To be a different color or to convert a racist
society from being that way. Consequently, they were left to their
own to act and to pray. And so, they did. Just as they innately
knew the best possible treatment was to love me in every possible
way. And so, they did.

Lovingly at night they placed me in a shoebox to be warmed by
a heater's fire as I slept and grew bigger, stronger inside With roots
that spread deep, far, wide, Touching and connecting well beyond
the sky To the very Source that has sustained and kept me
remarkably alive All through the years of many challenges,
injustices and inequalities that have caused the shedding of too
much blood and the crying of too many tears –All based on
fallacious and needless racially motivated fears rather than love.

But I grew. Love grew Love,
And despite the statistical odds against my living,
Love just kept right on giving and giving to assure that still today I
continue to be a marvel, I continue to be a miracle.
A mathematical genius who has been gifted with the privilege of
the ancient and ancestral vibration that helps to shatter myths and
correct mis-information about the Black image, the Black being
that too many are not seeing *in spirit and in truth*.

Because of our essence having too long been caricatured,
blemished, tainted, stained
Without compassion, without refrain
And, indeed, without adoration or consideration for God's
handiwork.

But I grew. Me—a delicate flower right from the very start-
Love grew Love for God blessed me with a guardian angel in the
person of my paternal aunt who recognized right from the
beginning the Truth about who and whose I really was and thus
claimed me as her heart.

Auntie's baby I was called because my aunt really did give me her all-and-all. She protected and cared for me and always dressed me in the best, giving me the message that, yes, I was *all that* and, indeed, mightily blessed, Treated me tenderly, elevating me to a status of privilege despite racism's intended poverty and image trap. And privileged I have been, just as privileged I am, For I am privileged to know the Truth about myself despite racism's façade, despite racism's great sham.

It has been with the help of many others, to include my parents, my siblings, friends and most especially my husband, children and grandson too, That I am still that delicate flower who shall now and forever be known as the Love that Love grew.

Participant #3—LW

LW is a sixty-five year-old male who is the father of one son, age thirty, and who identifies his marital status as separated. LW began his interview sharing that his great grandfather was an enslaved person who, once slavery theoretically ended, moved his family of eleven children from Greenville to Columbia, South Carolina where he purchased a considerable amount of land. Some of his land he donated to build a school and a church in the community that came to be known as State Park, a small enclave located near a mental health center where Black people were institutionalized. LW stated that residents of State Park did not have a lot of interaction with Whites. Residents of State Park were independently functioning to a great extent as they farmed the land, had their own schools and churches, celebrated various occasions (Easter, July 4, Labor Day, Christmas) and circumstances (graduations, sports events, picnics, barbecues), and even had their own remedies to cure various illnesses, making it seldom necessary for them to have to go outside the community for needs or survival purposes. Consequently, LW grew up with whites relatively at a distance, though indeed, always in some way, at the periphery of his life.

It was into this somewhat insulated, all Black community setting that LW made his entrance into the world in which he, as he reported, *was born with chicken pox*. His delivery was made by a midwife at his parents' home. His six siblings born after him, however, were all born in a hospital. He described his home and immediate surrounding environment as *very rich* where people looked out for each other and where he sensed that he was *very, very, special*, especially to his paternal grandmother. LW had a special bond and connection with his grandmother and she with him. She took him with her practically everywhere she went and he slept with her until the age of seven. His view of her approach to him was that, "she was going to put herself into me." As the eldest, she reared him to be a leader and to be in charge of and responsible for his siblings. As young as eight and nine, his grandmother helped to make sure that LW "was pretty sure of himself" and that he was, indeed, "a little leader in the family."

LW also recounted fond memories of his educational experiences. He and his siblings had to walk one-and-a-half miles to and from school. It was a small school for Blacks that he recalled "had a big potbelly stove." LW was always very inquisitive and loved learning. He was usually in a classroom with two or three different grades at one time, which he loved as it gave him exposure to more advanced knowledge and learning opportunities. The school had older students who, upon graduating and going to college and/or working, would return to assist them to plan and perform plays, operettas, and various other kinds of programs and activities that called upon him to participate and develop skills that have helped to augment his functioning and interacting in society still today.

LW reported emulating the school principal at a very young age, to include dressing like him. He saw all of this as part of his love for learning and his desire to be an integral contributor to his family, school, and community. The vibrancy and connectedness of the community and its members remained intact for LW until the period of time known as the Great Migration. He commented that, "What broke the community was the migration to the North, especially in the middle 1950s. There was nobody left to keep the community. The terrible thing is that people seemed to fair worse up North ...having to live in tenements and projects."

Lerone Bennett, Jr., in *The Shaping of Black America*, makes corroborative commentary to LW's insights as well as renders explanation as to why the overall conditions of Blacks did not change despite this massive geographical exodus from the South that began as early as the 1920s and '30s:

But the truly decisive step in the making of modern Black America was the Great Migration of the black masses to the North, a leaderless movement that changed the infrastructure of the black community, loosing explosive forces that are still rippling through American society. Neither the new forces nor the organizational initiatives changed the colonial system. After the Great Migration, the form of this system changed, but the domination and dependency continued. In the twenties and thirties, black laborers were consigned to the bottom of the labor pool, and the cities were divided racially by restrictive covenants and the discriminatory practices of federal, state, and municipal agencies. This made an immense difference to blacks, who, by World War II, were caught in a web that imprisoned every faculty and sense, a web as soft as cotton, yet unbreakable as steel.¹⁹

LW did hear stories about race and White people while growing up, especially from his mother who had racist memories and psychological and emotional scars that

¹⁹Lerone Bennett, Jr., *The Shaping of Black America: The Struggles and Triumphs of African-Americans, 1619 to the 1990s* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1993), 220.

were not to be forgotten. There was the family story told to LW and his siblings of how whites took land from his mother's parents (his maternal grandparents) and even killed one of their relatives. A great, maternal aunt to LW (and maternal aunt to his mother) was raped by whites. As he grew older, LW began to go into town more where he began to see for himself what others, like his mother, already lived and knew. He came to the assessment that, "Seems like Whites have everything and we were just stuck."

The day of this epiphany kept LW awake late into the night as he pondered, "How was this [the spiritual warfare of racism] going to change?" First, however, the power of the structure began to change him as he found himself like many others wanting to be *light skinned* and to have *good hair*—the image that the spiritual warfare of racism makes millions believe they *must have* in order *to be*. The researcher very intimately knows the power of this re-imaging process as she shared in her spiritual autobiography that as late as 1980 and 1984 she wished for characteristics of this pseudo-image to be upon her children, just as she had wished it for herself as well. LW, under the same racist influence, found himself wishing sometimes that he was not who and how he was—a symptom of ontological grief that rendered from him the perception that there was this need sometimes to make himself look *not dark*. Unknowingly and unsuspectingly, the vise of ontological grief had begun to cloak LW behind the Veil too. The spiritual warfare of racism had reared its ugly head and struck again, just as it had already been doing for over four centuries as the following commentary from *Hair Story* tells:

As the lighter-skinned, straighter-haired slaves—men and women—continued to curry favor with the Whites in power, a skin-shade, hair-texture hierarchy developed within the social structure of the slave community. There were the light-skinned house slaves and the dark-skinned field slaves. The light-skinned slaves were said to have "good hair," and the dark-skinned slaves

to have “bad hair.” Good hair was thought of as long and lacking in kink, tight curls, and frizz. And the straighter the better. Bad hair was the antithesis, namely African hair in its purest form. White [en]slave[rs] ... reinforced the “good-hair,” light-skin power structure in two ways. By selecting the lighter-skinned, straighter-haired slaves for the best positions within this household, he showed they were more desirable. At slave auctions he would pay almost five times more for a house slave than for a field slave, showing they were also more valuable.... Black people themselves internalized the concept and within their own ranks propagated the notion that darker-skinned Blacks with kinkier hair were less attractive, less intelligent, and worth less than their lighter-hued brothers and sisters. ‘We despise, we almost hate ourselves, and all that favors us,’ [i.e., ontological grief,] lamented one William J. Wilson in an article written in 1853 in *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. ‘Well may we scoff at black skins and woolly heads, since every model set before us for admiration, has pallid face and flaxen head.’²⁰

LW stated that it was after the age of twelve that he really began to run into the Black/White dynamic. Around age thirteen/fourteen he began to become defiant of racial rules and regulations intended to restrict his choices and movements. He and other Black males that he knew, developed relationships with White female peers. Some blacks were run out of town for doing so. It was this direct, though clandestine, contact with white females that “the mystique of who they were” was taken away for LW. The more he experienced the human commonality that existed between and amongst them from behind the Veil, the more he began to focus on what *race* really meant beyond the myths and incendiary conditioned reactions that kept its irrationalism’s intact. He wanted to understand what was it about skin color “really” that could cause one to be indiscriminately killed—murdered, lynched—and so terribly mistreated?

LW’s life dramatically and traumatically changed when his father was robbed and killed when LW was sixteen. His groomed role as the eldest paid off as he felt obligated

²⁰Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 19-20.

to earn additional income (he was already working at the time) to assist with the care of his six siblings and mother. Consequently, rather than using the scholarship he had to go to college, he opted to join the Navy. It was in the Navy that LW really came face-to-face with the evils and injustices of the spiritual warfare of racism. He recognized, however that even though he was in a racist society, he grew up in a community where people loved him and looked up to him. Racism, therefore, was an affront that he, now older and with a more mature understanding of its dynamics and intent, refused to allow its evils to penetrate his *being* as deeply as it previously had. He was no longer one to acquiesce to its expectation of his complete ontological submission to and acceptance of racial status quo. Additionally, he identified his religion to have been instrumental in helping him to view racism as a psychological, not just a social or racial, phenomenon. The knowledge and insight he gleaned from viewing racism from this perspective supported his understanding that those who seek to perpetuate it, do so for their own purposes of manipulation, dominance and control, not because they have been divinely endowed to do so.

LW left the Navy at age twenty-one, returned to school, obtained a Ph.D. and is now a university professor at a historically black university where his teaching specialty is political science and Black political theory. The researcher now presents LW's poem.

Awakened to Love

It was with the push and pull assistance of a trusted midwife
that I, on the 16th of April in 1942, was brought forward into life.
Brought into a world that I would come to first fondly know in
South Carolina as State Park,

An insulated community of family and friends that knew no end
to love;
A community that helped to develop my mind, body, soul and
heart
For all its members in some capacity played an integral part in
helping to shape and make me into who and how I am.

Loved deeply, even fiercely, by my mother, father and
grandmother as well as by many, many others,
To include most especially my uncles and aunts, my sisters and
brothers
Such that I realize now that it was the steady force of their love
that enabled me to feel and see a different, more evolved reality of
who I am, my essence, the person I call me,
An image much unlike the one negatively projected and portrayed
by the larger society.

For even with the wiles of racism raging and looming all
around,
I was sheltered and protected as the true nature of my being was
rooted firmly in a ground where the soil was intentionally,
methodically nurtured, watered, fertilized and pruned with tender
loving care
As I was made to know from the onset that there was and is much
within me worthy, noble, necessary to share with all whom I
encounter, no matter the status or state they might be in,
Even those extremely poverty exposed I sought to be a friend
Which is why I still today vividly hold inside my mind the image
of those who came to school with open toes and/or their father's
shoes tied to their feet,

Yet despite the obvious hardships of their outer circumstances
I was beckoned to know that the truth of their spirits I still had to
greet.
For I had not been conditioned to love less rather than more;
I had not been taught to separate myself from others, nor to shun
the poor.
Additional divisions and schisms of this type were, in State Park,
frivolities we could not afford.
And it has been the crux of such rich and rewarding experiences
that propelled me to want to know, hear, learn, and, yes, *taste and*
see, more and more.

So, I especially began to pay attention to what was being created socially according to what *we the people* mythologized as religion and thus too willed.

The necessity of doing so was indeed enhanced after my beloved father was senselessly knifed, robbed, killed.

It was an act that set into motion a development of me I could not stop or control;

It was an act that gripped and pained my entire family and community,

Just as it was an act that changed me deep in my soul.

Overnight, at sixteen, I grew from a young boy into a man even more inquisitive and determined to succeed, to show up, to stand as the eldest of my six siblings,

Groomed from the onset to take responsibility for their care and needs;

I had no time to wait around to beg, fight or plead for justice,

I had to go out into the world and usher it in.

So after graduating from high school with high honors and boundless determination,

I opted to turn down a full college scholarship and instead furthered my education by joining the not-yet-United-States of America's Navy.

And it was here, for the first time in eighteen years, that I was in close proximity with Whites and fully subjected to the many myths and senseless fears that bind and bound human relationships.

So shocked was I to learn just how narrow their thinking was and is about color and race,

Shocked to know how much their distorted and fallacious philosophies have perpetuated wars based on irrational rumors and their own internal sense of incompetence projected out onto others as racial hate.

Causing them to refute evidence that all can and should visibly and clearly see,

Especially when, we all know deep within our spirits and souls,

There is no real, meaningful difference between us and them, nor between you and me.

And even though the ceaseless bombardment of racist rhetoric in every life arena made me at one time want to be *less dark* and *more white*,

I am so grateful to have learned the ontological equality of all persons and people, although not in man's, but indeed in God's sight.

I am so grateful to have learned how to be an observer, rather than a reactor;
 Just as I am so grateful I've learned how to be a participant, rather than a detractor.
 For it has been from these positions of openness and engagement that I have come to be more concerned, not with racial hate, but rather with universal Love.
 It has been from racism's profound and pervasive detriment that I now value and appreciate Love as the one and only substance we truly need so much more of.

And from this boundless place of Love, the Love that created, holds and sustains all life,
 I have learned to embrace and fully accept who and how I am rather than expend energies trying to be that or what I am not;
 I have no desire or need to be someone or something else;
 No longer do I view myself from racial or racist eyes,
 No longer do I view myself or others like me as less.

The culmination of all my experiences from State Park to well beyond the Navy
 Has resulted in me returning to school to obtain a Ph.D. and become a university professor.
 And while political science is the subject matter I focus on and specifically teach,
 I now know that the most important lesson I can ever depart, Paradoxically stems from the depths of racism's pain and deep-rooted grief.
 And this, for me, is to always be an example of one who loves the spirit of God within myself as well as within all whom I am blessed to meet and greet for I,
 I have been awakened; I have been awakened to Love.

Participant #4—AC

AC is a forty-nine year-old, divorced female who is the mother of four children, ranging in ages from nineteen to twenty-four. She was born weighing five pounds in a hospital in Queens, New York and, although small, she was born very healthy. AC shares the story that her mother was initially scared to pick her up because she was so small. She actually would use a pillow to place AC on to carry her around. AC is the second

born (and first girl) of five children (two boys; three girls). She recounted that throughout her childhood and school life she was “very, very short and very, very small.” She laughingly tells the story of being able to walk underneath her family’s dinette table at the age of five.

AC has strong family connections to the South as well. Both of her parents are from South Carolina and grew up on a farm. Both her paternal and maternal grandparents were sharecroppers. Her parents were married and already had their first male child when they decided to join the many thousands of others aforementioned who opted to leave the racist Jim Crow and sharecropping system of the South and migrate instead to the North. They choose New York, although they continued to return *home* to visit and maintain family connections with those who remained in the South. AC reported vivid memories of visiting family in South Carolina as she recalled using an *outhouse* instead of a bathroom with indoor plumbing as they had in New York. Also, her grandparents had a cast iron stove that she carries a mark from today as she reached out to get a biscuit—then unaware that a stove like that actually could get hot. And then there were the baths in a big, tub basin and the freedom, unlike in the city, to run around in the yard barefoot.

The first major childhood memories that AC stated “shall forever stick with [her]” were at the age of twelve when she found herself “changing as an individual.” Because AC was so quiet, her mother took her to a doctor to find out what was wrong with her since she did not show interest in playing with or being in the company of other children. AC was not as active or as outgoing as her siblings who, as AC reports, were at the time running the streets and she was not. The doctor found nothing medically or psychologically wrong and told her mother that it was attributable to AC’s personality,

which is quiet and introverted. However, even with this assessment from the doctor, her mother continued to push AC to go outside to play with other children.

AC described herself as *a gazer*, someone who liked to watch other people play and walk around and look at the details of things. She would just stand and observe other people's actions and behaviors. AC's mother, out of concern for her being *normal* and able to be strong and make it in the world, continued to push her until, as AC stated, "She pushed me away." It was at this point that AC began to engage in what she deems frivolous activities—smoking, drinking—with others in her peer group but states she never liked or enjoyed doing so. She only did it because of her mother's continued persistence for her to be more social and interactive. This period was short lived, however, and AC resumed her life of spending time alone and gazing, just checking people and life out more from a distance, which for her was comfortable and safe.

The other remembrance AC had at age twelve was her need to have surgery to remove a lump from her breast. Although it was non-cancerous, AC gave the candid description that "it was a huge lump the size of a tennis ball," one that left yet another scar that she physically (and mentally and emotionally) carries today. The surgery was very traumatic for AC because of the fact that no one gave her any instructions on how to deal with it. She found out later as an adult after talking with her mother about this ordeal that her mother did not know, at the time, how to help her then twelve-year old daughter cope with "not having two full-size breasts." AC was left to learn how to mentally and emotionally deal with her physical realities on her own.

AC reported that school did not inspire her. She has had a learning challenge since a youngster that was not and has not been appropriately addressed during the majority of her school years. She attributes, however, her mother's insistence on education as being the catalyst and motivator that have kept her in school to include her current pursuits to obtain a Masters of Divinity degree at Howard University. Her own experiences as a person with learning challenges led her into her current vocation for the past seventeen years as a math teacher of children with special educational needs.

AC did not recall her parents talking about racism, at least not directly, because, as she stated, "They were more into trying to survive." They did not, however, manage to survive together for when she was still young, her parents separated. Her mother's biggest concern, thereafter, was having enough money to feed them. AC stated that "while [her mother] went on public assistance, she privately went on to clean other people's houses." AC used to accompany her mother during the summer to help her perform these domestic chores and duties.

AC indicated that it was not until she left home and went to college at age seventeen that she really began to encounter racism more directly, especially when she would return home to pursue summer employment. She recounted an incident that occurred after her sophomore year. She went to an agency for an interview and after waiting several hours, she began to converse briefly with a White female who had recently arrived to be interviewed as well. The conversation revealed that the latter was a high school graduate compared to AC having two years of college. While AC was never given an interview, the White female was not only given an interview, but hired and immediately allowed to begin work.

Another incident that occurred to AC when she was around eighteen or nineteen years old that she attributes to racism and reportedly made her very angry, happened late one night in New York when she and a date were returning from the movies. Suddenly and frighteningly, they found themselves cornered in a dead-end area surrounded by police with guns drawn directly in their faces. They learned, based on the interrogation, that the police were in search of two Blacks who reportedly had committed a murder. Once it was determined that they were not the perpetrators, the police never said anything and just turned around and left, leaving the two of them to deal with the trauma of the experience the best way they could. AC stated about the experience: "I was just amazed how they stigmatize Black folks. We all look alike. We all sound alike. We all act alike and that was not the case.... So I was amazed, nervous, scared and angry... And they never apologized." When asked, "Whom did you and your date tell about the incident?" her response was, "No one. We just talked about it between us, but we did not share it with anyone else...not my parents." Again, the silence was deafening.

It was not until AC was in her forty's that she began to more openly communicate with her mother and father. Prior to this, they learned how to keep things inward and, as she stated, "just deal with life the best you could." Consequently, AC did not feel she was equipped "*to deal with life*" when she first left home and was faced with living as an adult. She has made it a value and a practice to communicate with her four children, to have family meetings and discussions, including about racism. She consciously has sought to rear them "*to be leaders of themselves*" so that they are better prepared than she was to confront the social and racial challenges that exist in society.

AC identifies God as the key to her existence. As she stated about her personal relationship with God: "I don't know how to live without Him.... When I sought Him daily, He would give me wisdom. He would give me direction. He would tell me how to deal with the biases around me...." Her favorite scripture is Isaiah 54:7 as she assures herself that, "no weapon formed against her shall prosper." It is AC's strong belief and opinion that we need to go back to where our forefathers and foremothers were, the place where they had God first in their lives. The researcher now presents AC's poem.

A Queen is Born

I was born a Queen—and only fittingly and originally in
Queens, New York.
And I have been special all my life, even before I could talk or
walk under our dining room table when I was as young as five
years old.

I have always carried within me the discerning wisdom of an
ancient, old soul,
Which is why I have always opted to watch and observe before I
joined in, but not to play this worldly game in life called racism
that fails to validate and affirm the Truth of who you are or who I
am any old way.

And so I have learned to become a gazer—
Looking, peering as long as I have to until I see beyond racism's
illusive Veil,

Penetrating and piercing the surface in order to go all the way, if
necessary, beyond the bottom of the well,
To receive the true image and messages that only a clean heart can
reveal and a right spirit can tell.

And though my mother took me to the doctor to see what (with
me) was wrong,
Since I didn't socialize and engage like my siblings, peers or
others, She was concerned that I didn't have what it would take to
be in this world, capable, strong.

And while the doctor correctly assessed that I was just fine,
 Determining that I had a unique-kind-of-personality,
 What he couldn't diagnose or tell my mother was that I lived and
 moved and had my being centered in a different-kind-of-reality
 than the one that attempted to re-create me and re-define me and
 thus make me and confine me into some *thing* that I am not, as if I
 too am not one of God's own.
 So grateful I am to have chosen the sidelines rather than play a
 game racially designed to lead me and millions of others, not just
 astray, but absolutely, totally wrong.

But even from this position I have had my share of trials and
 tribulations,
 some of which have put me in shock—
 Like having major surgery as a teenager without the proper
 information to having guns drawn in my face due to mistaken
 identity by New York City cops who,

After having realized my date and I were not the ones who had
 committed the murder,
 merely turned and walked away without uttering a word or offering
 an apology, Never once acknowledging their error.
 And then there was the incident when I was home for the summer
 after two years of college and I waited and waited in an office for a
 job interview that I never got,
 Only to witness one without a high school diploma walk in and be
 given the position right on the spot,
 Solely because, according to racism's pathology, she was a color
 that I was not.

So yes, I have continuously sought to remove myself from such
 illogical thinking and inhumane actions,
 For in this racist madness were I to constantly let myself remain,
 What else could I do but like too many others, in some form or
 fashion, go righteously insane— Whether in body, mind, spirit or
 soul, the true story of racism's pervasive detriment and destruction
 to countless billions is still yet to be known and, indeed, still yet to
 be told.

And I, as a Queen—befittingly and originally from Queens,
 New York—am created by God to excel and go exceedingly far
 above and way beyond what racists could ever think or perceive in
 their imagination,
 Which is why I have heeded my mother's advice to pursue and
 obtain higher education.

Just as I've taken on my family's values for perseverance,
determination and strong
work ethics.
I have pushed and prevailed through much that has been a
physical, mental and emotional challenge;
I've come to learn and love that there is nothing that can happen in
my life that God and I together can't handle.

Which is why my theological battle cry has been, is and forever
shall be: "No weapon formed against me shall prosper."
So no matter how distorted the worldly and racist images are that
they project, portray and try to make others see,
I will stand still and gaze, looking and observing until God gives
me the spiritual discernment and direction I need in order to know
the Truth of who, whose, and why I truly be!
After all, I am a Queen, and yes, befittingly and originally born in
Queens, New York.

Participant #5—MC

MC is a fifty-six year-old, divorced female and mother of two children, ages thirty-six and thirty-two. She grew up in the state of Mississippi and is the youngest of fourteen children who survived (nine did not). She was reared in the midst of the unjust laws and practices of Jim Crow and recounted many graphic accounts of the injustices inflicted against them as a family, particularly against her father. MC described her father as "a hard working man, who tried to do the best he could with what he had but he seemed to always come up short." She attributed her father's difficulties to the fact that the spiritual warfare of racism did not allow him (and millions of others) to be formally educated, and thus, a lot of things were taken from him. MC is angered still today about *how horribly unjust* her father was treated.

Growing up in Mississippi was very difficult for MC and her family. She reported that there were many days they had to go without food. Three or four siblings had to share one bed. They went to school without lunch money or the proper attire to keep

them warm. They had no medical care, as they were not allowed to go to the hospital, or to see a doctor. Her mother knew and used many home remedies to attend to their illnesses and health care needs. They had one pair of shoes for school and church. Often they were ridiculed. However, in the midst of all that they did not have, MC and her siblings were faithfully taught by both parents to be grateful for what they did have because there was always the story of somebody whose situation and conditions were worse.

MC identified herself as a child who always had questions of “Why?” Questions such as: “Why were they and other Black families so underprivileged? Why were Blacks treated so differently? Why did her parents have to address other adults with, ‘Yes, Sir’ and ‘No, Ma’am’ when the reciprocal was not true? Why was the quality of education for Black children different and not equal that of Caucasian children? Who started things to be the way they were and who authorized it?” Although MC had many questions, answers were not forthcoming—not from home, not from school, and, not from church either.

Although MC failed to receive answers to her many queries and wonderments, she knew, even as a youngster, that there was something very wrong about the way things were. She knew that they should not have had the kind of living quarters in which they had to live. She knew her father should not have had to wait until late at night to take his own crops to feed them as a family, usually still hungry from days and weeks before, because someone else was claiming primary ownership to them and was legally, but amorally, sanctioned to do so. She knew her father should have been a millionaire but he kept being cheated out of what was his. She also knew her father should not have had to

sell property that he worked hard to pay for just because a white man decided and told him, “You are going to sell this property. Niggers don’t own property.” She knew that their “having to up and move and change schools because of being downgraded by the White man was not right.”

As can be gleaned from MC’s story thus far, her father, like many other Black men and families of the South became controlled and owned by the new form of *sanctioned slavery* known as sharecropping immediately after slavery *supposedly* officially ended after the Civil War. (As previously mentioned, Participant # 4, AC’s maternal and paternal grandparents were sharecroppers as were her parents until they migrated to New York after the birth of their first child). From a public policy perspective, Dr. Claud Anderson lends insight into this period as well as this system in *Black Labor, White Wealth*, a perspective that provides answers to many of the lingering questions MC was left with as a child:

In reconciling postwar differences, the North adopted the public policy of its Southern brothers on the treatment of blacks. There was never any serious effort to give blacks any measure of economic independence or to compensate them for their generations of unpaid labor.... To change blacks’ status as laborers would cause changes in society’s political and social ordering of acceptability. Thus, the North and the South collectively agreed to continue, but modify, the basic tenets undergirding the public policy on blacks. The black freedmen were penniless, uneducated, homeless and friendless in a hostile South. Without land reparations or tools, they had little choice except to offer the market their only resource – themselves. As an available, trained, cheap labor force, blacks stepped into a predictable future. The Southern states enacted the Black Codes, which revised the national policy on blacks, forcing them into sharecropping on Southern farms under the control of former slave holders. The Black Codes effectively modified the public policy by substituting sharecropping for slavery. It also fixed black people in a subordinate place in the social order and provided white society with a manageable and inexpensive labor force. The principle

behind the national public policy remained intact and survives to this day.²¹

It was the realities of this harsh, cruel, and, seemingly, insurmountable system that resulted in MC not really knowing several of her oldest siblings as they opted to leave Mississippi and relocate to Florida, an area where they hoped they would be better treated and given more equitable opportunities in life. MC told of how her brothers tried to find jobs that would enable them to help their father *provide a decent living for the family*, only to be treated, as she described, *as though we were animals*. There were people they knew, or knew of, who came up missing or their bodies were found hung, beaten, mutilated. Her brothers did not want to kill or to be killed or to go to prison so they left. MC was fourteen when they, as a family, “left the farm and went to the city area.” Her father took a job as a baker for he no longer wanted to deal with the injustices inherent in farming a system called *sharecropping* where he never got his share of his own crops.

The church and religion played vital roles in MC’s life. She described her parents as “devout Christians who believed God would deliver them.” They were taught that although they were underprivileged, no one was any better than they were. It was emphasized that they *were not* to walk around with their heads down just because they were poor. MC’s father taught them “to be independent and to work to have their own.” This was very important to him since the spiritual warfare of racism stopped him from having “his own” to the extent he desired and worked hard for.

MC’s mother focused on teaching them morals and values that included not hating others. They were taught how to treat other people as they wanted to be

²¹Claud Anderson, *Black Labor, White Wealth: The Search for Power and Economic Justice* (Edgewood, MD: Duncan & Duncan, Inc., 1994), 161.

treated as well as how to carry and conduct themselves. For MC and her sisters the focus was always on “being a lady.” They had to learn the rules of survival in the Jim Crow South. There were certain places they could and could not go. They were cautioned “to be careful” about many things and, no matter what, not to walk alone. MC shared about a time a cousin and she had gone downtown when some White guys rode by and threw cigarettes and beer at them. Even though they did tell their parents, they all knew it was a waste of time to call the cops for there was no system of accountability for the actions of Whites in the racist and Jim Crow South. To these various injustices, MC commented, as did so many other participants, that “that’s just the way things were.”

And yet, despite the way things were, MC has moved forward in her life and career. As one who has always been good with numbers, she has a bachelor’s degree in business management and, as a devout Christian like her parents, she has accepted “the call” into ministry and is currently pursuing a Masters of Divinity degree at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. The researcher now presents MC’s poem.

Fitted for Love

On the Sunday that I was born—
 I don’t know if it was in the late of evening or, in the early of
 morn—
 What I do know is that my father looked in the Bible, pointed
 his finger, and said,
 “Here, give her this name,” which is exactly what my Mama did.
 Never did it matter that he could not read it, nor really knew
 grammatically what it meant;
 He just somehow instinctively knew in his own discerning
 wisdom,
 That what he lovingly chose for me as a name,
 Would somehow help fit me for Love just the same.

And this is now a favorite family story about the origin of how I came to join my family of sixteen in Mississippi where Jim and Jane Crow lived too.

It was a place where the deeply entrenched structures of centuries of racism determined and dictated what Black folks could and could not do,

All based on the false notion that a particular skin color made some superior and endowed with privileges erroneously claimed to be divine birthrights,

Even though it meant the culprits who were deceived to believe such spiritual nonsense—

Whether boldly by day with illegal laws and customs backing them up or with hooded sheets, guns and rope cowardly at night-

Forced this pathology onto others through attitudes and actions that enslaved, raped, beat, maimed, terrorized, castrated and lynched Millions upon millions leaving behind them, wherever they went, both symbolically and literally, the putrid smell, the putrid stench of human flesh being burnt alive,

As the horrid and piercing sound of soul-pain and grief filled the land, filled the skies as these same millions upon millions were forced to relinquish their rights *to be*,

Forced to relinquish their rights to human pride and dignity. And I, as a youngster, could not for the life of me accept or understand,

Why we as a people were relegated to a sub-station in life that God did not condone And, indeed, that God did not ordain.

Forced to live an existence that is still today absolutely irrational and downright insane,

An existence that is unexplainable when our basic human needs are not different, but rather, exactly the same.

For any human being to heartlessly and viciously hurt, harm, wound and attempt to destroy another,

Is directly opposed to God's plan for us to live in unity and harmony as beloved sisters and brothers.

But this un-united and divided state that we too often find ourselves in has,

Without ceasing, always been spiritual warfare's ultimate mission and goal:

And this is to assure that we fail to know and thus fail to give expression to God's deep, abiding Love that created us and gifts and graces our hearts, minds, bodies and souls.

For who could not question and righteously condemn the patheticness and idiocy of a so-called human structure that forces a man to wait to be covered by the dark

of night in order for him to do what some would call steal,

Even though he was taking his very own crops in order to put together enough to make a simple meal that could feed his family who was still hungry from previous nights, if not weeks and months before;

A man whose work ethics and skills should have made him a millionaire, but instead,
the evil system of racism assured that the harder he worked, the more he wound up with less and less and less rather than more,
As the South's sharecropping system kept in place a structure, like slavery, that illegally and amorally sanctioned injustices and inequalities that, in so many ways sealed his and so many others' fate,
As their God-given abilities were consumed time and time again by fires that were ignited and spread constantly by racial hate.

Such was the unfortunate plight of my father, a plight I painfully witnessed and watched him have to confront more than once with my very own eyes,
And how heart-wrenching it was to see a man such as he—hardworking, dedicated, caring, loving, smart—repeatedly get reduced by the crushing weight of racism down to a mere fraction of his actual size.

Property that he worked hard and long and long and hard to buy and call his own,
Property that was taken from him in an instant because the racist ideology spewed from the lips of those theologically ignorant and spiritually confused,
Claimed it could not possibly belong to those whom they spitefully opposed and then cruelly imposed the derogatory label of *nigger*.

And so we were uprooted as my father, without rhyme, reason, or choice, was unjustly forced to relinquish what was rightfully his and we were made to pack up, leave our home and move.
It was a move that caused us as an-already-struggling family to struggle and lose so much more, including a modicum of stability, and, for us as children, even our school.

It was the consequence of this and many other racist realities that caused me not to really know several of my older siblings,
For the negative impact of racism made them make the decision to relocate to Florida for they did not want to remain in Mississippi where the odds were too high against them for being kept in poverty, lynched or even being wrongly sent to prison.

As I look back at the past as well as at the continued racist actions of today,
 I can't help but marvel that my parents managed to rear us to not hold grudges, to not harbor hate.
 For they both believed in God and expected God's goodness and justice to prevail,
 It was only their faith in God and their love for us that helped them to endure and make it through racism being an unrelenting, living hell.

And no matter how hard it was or how little we often had,
 We were taught to be grateful for something even when we lacked sufficient food, the proper clothes or would have to go without a decent pair of shoes.
 We were taught to recognize and appreciate our blessings and to do and give our best,
 Despite being wrongfully mistreated, despised and ridiculed.

These teachings have been invaluable to me, especially when I, as a young adult,
 Became the first Black employed at a major department store in Mississippi called Belk's
 Where the majority were strongly opposed to my very being, to my very presence.
 But nonetheless, amidst racial slurs and hateful stares, I had been mentally prepared and spiritually equipped, to delve deep within myself in order to perform and exist at my essence.

But before I was hired, I was repeatedly denied, no matter the many different times I tried,
 Until, one day when they were emboldened by the stereotypical myth about Black ignorance, they gave me a test they thought I would fail.
 But as soon as I saw it was math, I knew I had it made, for as a person who has always been good with numbers, I passed with more than flying colors.
 And though they were chagrined and reluctantly hired me, as long as I worked there,
 I never saw them hire another.

Undoubtedly this experience and others helped prepare me throughout the course of my employment career,
 As I have found that being an only one or one of a few in the midst of the so-called majority has long been my lot,
 And every time I seek and strive to take full advantage of what I know is God blessing me with an opportunity,

For I vividly and graphically remember when my beloved dear mother and father and so many, many others simply could not.

And now that I am in seminary pursuing a Masters of Divinity degree,
I appreciate all the more how my parents, even when fighting the hounds of racism, had the spiritual tenacity and acuity to hear, feel, taste and see Love.
Yes, even in the midst of structural racism, they still chose Love.
Which is why my father knew when he pointed in the Bible and lovingly gave me my name,

That although he was oppressed and kept from being a formally educated man,
His and their love for me would help Love to fit me just the same.
For I, like they, am Love.
I am Love.
I am Love.
I am Love.

Participant #6—LB

LB is a forty-eight year-old, separated mother of one child, a daughter, age fourteen. She was born in Washington, D.C. as the ninth of ten children (three boys, seven girls). Her *birth story* is that her mother was doing laundry one day and while hanging clothes on the line outside, her water broke. An ambulance was immediately called, however, by the time it arrived, LB was already in the world, ready *to be*. She and her mother were still taken to the hospital even though her healthy delivery had already occurred.

LB's mother was originally from South Carolina, however, around the age of sixteen, she went to live with one of her sisters in D.C. after their mother (LB's maternal grandmother) died. They continued to live together even after they had children so LB grew up with both immediate and extended family. Her mother worked as a domestic cleaning houses and office buildings. Despite her work outside the home, LB reported

that her mother fed them well—beans, fruit, green vegetables, etc.—and made sure they had at least the basic necessities they needed in life. She was the family disciplinarian as well.

LB described her as “one who did not talk a lot,” although she was fair. She was authoritative and her method of discipline was whipping. LB’s father, on the other hand, did not beat them, he only had to give them a certain look or raise his voice and they would make the adjustments necessary to avoid any further actions from him. Her father was originally from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, but then later moved to the DC area. He was a long distance truck driver and spent a lot of time away from home, usually not returning until late at night.

When LB was three, her family moved into another house in the District. By this time, some of her older siblings had already moved out on their own. She described life at home as “sometimes challenging,” primarily because the relationship between her parents was usually strained. Her father went out on the weekends and would initiate an argument with her mother to make sure he had justified reasons to go. There was also physical fighting between them. They eventually separated, leaving LB’s mother with the primary responsibility of rearing them. They were reared to be close to one another as they still are today. LB’s mother would beat them if they called each other derogatory names, especially the word or name *Black* if used pejoratively.

LB attended Black public schools. Her primary interests, as she stated, were in having fun and playing sports, which she did both well. Her sports of choice were volleyball and track. She has trophies from each to legitimate her former playing and running abilities. LB started working with a track coach in elementary school who has

continued to be influential throughout her life. He coached her through many valuable life lessons using track as a metaphor. A favorite saying of her coach that reminds and encourages LB to be conscientious of where she is in life and where she desires to go is, Stay in your lane!—no matter what else is happening around her or what others might be doing, or where they might even be going.

It was not until LB went South to attend college in Charlotte, North Carolina that she encountered race and color as predominant issues and in ways that she did not experience in DC. The obvious standards for beauty and, simultaneously, popularity on campus were those deemed more European: light skinned and long, straight hair—as Byrd and Tharps have said, “the straighter the better.” LB described herself as having a very distinct, muscular body, which caused her to, in her words, “look more like the [African] Natives.” She shared the story of being told by a male that she had a beautiful body, however, she would be more popular if she was lighter. LB, like millions, was conditioned by the spiritual warfare of racism to want lighter skin and long, straight hair. She too was pulled within the Veil, the Veil of ontological grief.

LB has done a lot of work learning to accept who and how she is. She now wears her hair in a natural style. She made the comment during the interview that, “One of the things I’m still getting comfortable with is wearing my hair this way after having been asked and told at the same time: ‘Aren’t you going to straighten your hair? Your hair is nappy.’” The social pressures and aesthetic fears of having *nappy hair* for African Americans have been intense, pervasive, and even, from the viewpoint of ontological grief, egregious. LB’s ongoing journey to, not just “hair freedom,” but authentic, holistic, ontological freedom, understandably does and will take some time as hair specialist

authors, Byrd and Tharps, realized during the *Black is Beautiful* movement of the latter sixties and seventies:

While the Afro and natural hair may have found a broadening of the idea of what was considered beautiful and proud, in many ways victory was declared too soon. The United States was two hundred years old, and for the duration of its history Blacks and their features had been deemed ugly. It would take more than a few years and few Afros [and a few short cut, natural hair styles] to turn things around.²²

Their realizations are just as applicable today as indicated by LB's comments about her hair and the effort she is engaged in "to turn things around in her own head" in order to not be influenced by negative critiques previously received and directed against the essence of her very being.

LB talked about the shame, guilt, and pain associated with the dehumanizing way Blacks are too often viewed, approached, and treated as if, she says, "we really are the problem; as if, somehow, we should have known better and done better and been better." DuBois also had a keen sensitivity to the subliminal message, or rather question, underlying what oftentimes got posed to him as well by Whites:

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. ... To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. And yet, being a problem is a strange experience-peculiar....²³

As the mother of a daughter with cerebral palsy, LB has had to advocate within a system that not only defines her *being* as an African American as a problem, but also the double social whammy of her daughter *being* African American and special needs. When

²² Byrd and Tharps, 71.

²³ DuBois, 1-2.

it comes to dealing with differences in this country, we remain neophytes. LB has had to ceaselessly transcend the “strange and peculiar experience” of being viewed by others as a problem in order to advocate getting the answers, solutions, and resources she needs as a single parent to meet the multiple care needs of her daughter. LB has painful memories and heart scars from some of the unloving people she has encountered as she has had to do so.

LB has come to a place of recognition that the spiritual warfare of racism does seek to deny her deservability, her right *to be* and her right to have according to God’s riches and promises. She now consciously and actively works hard to not plug into these fallacious and damaging racial myths and behaviors. As a testament to her determination, the researcher now presents LB’s poem.

I AM LOVE!

I was valuable from the moment I was born.
 And this Truth about me remains even though I am part of
 a people who,
 for centuries, have been ridiculed, caricatured, scorned
 for no reason other than that as human beings, we have
 hardened our hearts,
 making it more and more difficult for us to chart and follow
 a path to Love.

 But Love I Am as Love is the purpose I was brought forth
 to be;
 Love is the force that guides, protects and enables me to see
 beyond stereotypes and labels that can never, forever define or
 confine me from being spiritually set free Again and again to
 Love—
 For Love is what God has created and purposed for us right from
 the very beginning.

And thus, despite all the challenges and changes and complexities of living
 in a structurally racist society, there is no ending to my desire, or to my need,
 To both give and to receive Love.

Even as I witnessed the racialized stress and strain my parents, in raising us, had to endure, I could rely and depend on, no matter what, their love for us always being steady, always being sure, as the need to provide often kept Daddy away, although he received low pay, to do long-distance truck driving. While Mama was more local, she was still too often in other folks' homes and offices as a domestic, striving
 and striving together—at least for awhile—trying to make ends meet,
 as the harshness of racism forced them to constantly struggle against being immobilized by that which was like steel, by that which was like concrete.
 And so they too learned how to put on that socially-conditioned-plastic smile rather than presenting to the world the righteousness of their anger, their pain, their tears, their grief.

But yet! But yet! Ironically they taught me the necessity of delving deeper and deeper in order to soar higher to enter into that place within myself where I can be freer,
 as Mama, especially, was wise and discerning. She nurtured and fed the ten of us, while simultaneously, she kept us hungry for learning as well as yearning for much more than the outside world could ever offer or give.
 She instilled in us values and principles that continue to guide us on how to live day-to-day in an inequitable and unjust society where, as Blacks, we are constantly under ethnic and racial attack, with no sign of easement or slack in sight. For still today we have to fight for our right *to be*.

And it has been in the midst of all of this, that I have had to claim my deservability,
 and to remember the advice I was told long ago, from a beloved coach who said emphatically: "Protect your lane!" Protect my lane, not just on the trackfield,
 but also on the field of life;
 Protect my lane so I can remain sane as the insanity of racism has more than once tried
 to grip, not just my mind, body and spirit, but to claim my soul, all at a heavy price.

Which is why I have had to say to so, so many:
 No, the historical look in your eyes will not reduce or minimize
 who I am or my essence;
 Nor will the judgment in your voice drive away God's indwelling
 Spirit, power and presence from within me or from my family,
 which now includes my precious daughter,
 One whom I must now too love and protect from racial hurt and
 heartache and ultimate racial slaughter.

So I have learned to listen to the still quiet voice within that
 speaks Love to me ceaselessly until I drink of the nectar of heaven
 here on earth;

Until I go back in memory to the moment of creation to the
 moment of my birth
 And I again remember, reclaim and then actually be who and
 whom and whose and
 what and why I AM: LOVE.

I AM LOVE!—despite racism's pervasive impact and
 devastating toll;
 I AM LOVE!—despite human inequalities and injustices that
 attempt to destroy my very soul;
 I AM LOVE!—despite the choices of others that do not allow
 them to know or to see;
 I AM LOVE!—despite the behavior of others that fail to validate
 and affirm me.
 I AM LOVE! I AM LOVE! I AM LOVE!
 Thank God Almighty, I AM LOVE!

Participant #7—MK

MK—after being given a death prognosis by physicians over thirty years ago with
 family gathered by her bedside consumed with grief and tears—is a miraculous seventy-
 five years young! She identifies as a New Afrikan, connoting her African ancestry and
 the new *being* that has emerged here in America as a result of all that African people
 have been subjected to as well as have overcome. She is the mother of one son, age
 thirty-nine, and grandmother of five. MK recounted the rare experience of, in 1933, being
 born in a black hospital in Nashville, Tennessee called Hubbard. Hubbard Hospital was

an extension of what is now the renowned, Meharry Medical Center. MK emphasizes that she was surrounded by love and admiration from the onset of her entrance into the world and not in a segregated facility with hostile nurses and hostile people like her older and only sibling, a sister. As the story has been lovingly told to her by other family members, MK was greeted at birth by those present exclaiming, “What a beautiful baby!”

MK continued to receive compliments about “her looks” throughout her childhood and adult life. She noted that her sister did not receive as many compliments, which MK believes was racially motivated only because she was of a lighter complexion than her sister. Irrespective of the differences shown toward them because of color, MK and her sister were both loved, sometimes in different ways by different people, but nonetheless loved. They were also each made aware of the spiritual warfare of racism at very early ages, most especially by their great, great grandmother whom they affectionately called, *Granny*. MK shared that her *Granny* was enslaved until she was around age sixteen at which time she was also forced to marry a seventy-two year-old White man with whom she had a child.

MK rendered a vivid description of her great, great grandmother as “a very wise and beautiful and queenly person who wore aprons and bonnets ...and could balance things on her head.” MK and her sister sat by the grate (fireplace) with Granny many nights and times as she talked to and shared with them stories about Whites. As MK stated, “She didn’t tell us stories like fairytales. She told us stories, stories of enslavement.” MK and her sister witnessed the cascading of many tears as Granny painfully remembered how, on the slave camp, when girls would reach puberty, White men would start drinking and come and select the girls and position them spread eagle

on the ground and then pour turpentine on their vaginas—as if to cleanse them—and then they would pull trains on them, i.e., taking turns raping them. Tears would stream down Granny’s face as though she could still hear their screams. MK shared this story with tears streaming down her own face as well.

What impressed young MK most about her “Granny was her ability to weigh things without the benefit of a scale.” MK recalled how they would go to the store and the White butchers would always gather around Granny and give her different sizes of meat for her to “guesstimate” the weight. And then they would put it on the scale and be incredulous that it was always accurate. It was the White butchers’ superior attitudes that infuriated MK as they were always trying “to catch” Granny and make her be wrong for it was difficult for them to understand, much less accept, how a black woman, especially a dark-skinned black woman, could be that smart. MK smiled as she recalled how her “Granny enjoyed showing them that they could not catch her and that she too was aware of their superior attitudes. MK also found it quite insulting that the butchers and other Whites called her Granny, “Auntie,” not affectionately or respectfully, but rather for purposes of ontological disregard and disrespect of and for her true essence and *being* in order to elevate and claim themselves as superior. The psychological dynamics of this process of “de-naming” is addressed by Joe Kovel in *White Racism*:

As humans we demand self-expression and recognition. We insist on the integrity of the “I,” which recognizes itself in the other person and is recognized in turn. Racism, however, is the domain of the Other. When the self becomes Other, it is denied recognition and by extension, self-expression. The Other is seen not for what it is, but for what it evokes. Thus the real being of the black person becomes significant in contrast to the intrinsically inconsequential color of his or her skin. The Other is assigned some part of the dominant self which is unbearable yet desired [hence the name,

Auntie]; and this alienated part comes to define his or her existence. Therefore the Other is not recognized for him/her self, but as the repository of some split-off element of the dominant self. In other words, white racism is for whites. Blacks are made to disappear as persons in its course.²⁴

The de-naming or the categorizing of one's *being* to that of Other is the ontological reductionism that occurs when an *I-Thou* relationship is reified to an *I-It* relationship as the Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, addresses in his classic treatise, *I and Thou*:

When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. For where there is a thing there is another thing. Every *It* is bounded by others; *It* exists only through being bounded by others. But when *Thou* is spoken, there is no thing. *Thou* has no bounds. When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no *thing*; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation.²⁵

MK's Granny was the family griot who "took a stand in relation" to her *Thou*—despite being viewed and treated as if an *It*—and a stand in relation for the *Thou* of others (her tears for the *Thou* of the screaming young girls who were raped as *Its*). She was the keeper of the family's sacredness as *Thous* as she assured that the legacy of the experiences and memories of the family, such as the ones just cited, were passed on from generation to generation.

MK also shared about a paternal uncle whom she described as "absolutely brilliant with dark skin and blue eyes," evidence, she states, of "just how mixed up we sometimes are." Her uncle rode a motorcycle and refused to do menial labor. He took a correspondence course in electricity and became a masterful electrician. Despite his

²⁴Joe Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), xliii-xliv.

²⁵Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2d ed., 1958), 4.

multiple abilities and skills, he was never able to get into the union although he tried several times in both Tennessee and Indiana. Ironically and sadly, whenever unionized White firms and agencies encountered electrical jobs they could not do, MK's uncle was the very person they would seek out to do them. The cognitive and emotional dissonance this abusive arrangement created within him contributed to him trying to drown his sorrows and pain of living, of *being*, in alcohol. It was a desperate ontological act that resulted in his early demise at the young age of sixty.

MK was exposed to an intellectually rich and stimulating environment. Her maternal grandmother worked in a library and availed many books for their perusal and pleasure. Her mother took her sister and her to Fisk University to hear the lectures and speeches of various scholars. Her father and his two brothers were entrepreneurs. They had their own businesses as they refused to work within a system that denigrated and devalued them—at least to the extent that they could avoid doing so. MK's parents separated and divorced when she was young. Her mother relocated to Chicago. MK and her sister initially went with her, but around the age of twelve or thirteen, MK went to live with her father again in Nashville. They maintained a close and mutually loving relationship until his recent death (October 2007). He was 95. MK's mother died much earlier in life, as did MK's sister.

MK was groomed to be conscious of and in action against inequalities and injustices from every possible angle and aspect of living for she recognizes them all, ultimately, to be of the same ilk: socially, economically, physically, ethnically/racially, etc. From her great, great grandmother (Granny) to her uncles to her mother to her father and to the many ancestors who have sacrificed and gone before her, she stands tall upon

their shoulders as she takes a stand for justice, equality, liberation, and love. She was crushed between two cars in 1974 as a result of her impassioned and ceaseless activism. While the incident has resulted in her now being in, but not confined to, a wheelchair, she remains a strong and outspoken advocate for human and civil rights. She has helped to organize and operate tenant associations, chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and many other venues and efforts whose mission and purpose are in some way tied to freedom.

MK had the experience of being run out of Mississippi and forced out of Virginia—again because of her activism and unwavering stance for justice and equality. For one who has actively and emphatically lived for seventy-five years—to include ignoring the imminence of death on more than one occasion—there is much more that can be and should be said. The researcher does so now by introducing and sharing MK's poem.

A New Afrikan Warrior Queen Mother

I was born in a Black hospital in Nashville, Tennessee called Hubbard, a hospital that is a part of the medical college now famously known as Meharry,
A hospital where I was surrounded by people who were loving and caring and who exclaimed after my entrance into the world, "Oh my, what a beautiful baby!"

My very being was encircled with admiration as well as adoration right from the very start,
I was special to and loved by many, but most of all I was my Daddy's favorite; I was my Daddy's heart.

And as I grew, I never knew a time when I wasn't looked upon and considered pretty.
My sister and I were validated and affirmed in our existence, even when we played and got dirty.

It was in this warm, loving and rich cultural environment that I was nurtured to excel.

I learned about the evils of racism early on as I was reared on real stories of oppression and enslavement, not on those of make-believe fairytales.

Mother would take my sister and me to hear lectures at Fisk University where we were fed hope and greater possibilities by distinguished scholars, activists and orators —persons valued and respected in our communities, yet by our oppressors, they were negatively viewed and labeled agitators.

But nonetheless, they came and we grew big inside as they taught us to have love and pride for one another as well as for ourselves.

And then at night, often by a warm grate fire, we sat at our great grandmother's feet, and she, with a strong and impassioned griot's voice, would emphatically speak to us of bloodshed, horror, woe, pain, grief.

So vivid and graphic were her recounts, I could feel the screams she painfully heard as she re-lived through what she remembered time and time again,

as tears cascaded down her face leaving a stream of memories I will never forget or forsake.

For she was one born into the horrid, dehumanizing system of slavery, at least until

around age sixteen, an age and time when she was forced to marry a seventy-two year-old, old white man, although she was a young, vibrant, vivacious, brilliant, stately queen.

I shall always marvel at her ability to accurately weigh the size of fresh cut meats

without the benefit of a scale.

And no matter how many times white butchers with falsely assumed superior

attitudes tried to trip her up, the accuracy of the weight she could always tell.

And then there was my maternal uncle who was dark complexioned with blue eyes;

a brilliant electrician whose entrance into the union was repeatedly denied no matter

how many times or the many creative and sincere ways he tried.

But when a unionized firm had an electrical job that they could not figure out or do,

my uncle was the very one they would always come to.

For to them he was a commodity whose skills they could use for
 their own purposes
 at will and at whim, skills that were rare and indeed masterful.
 Yet, when he attempted to use these same skills to achieve and
 advance within the
 system on his own, he was treated ever so dastardly!

A *whole* lot of genius gone to waste as the pain and grief of
 being so used, abused
 and wrongly treated, contributed to his dying from alcohol
 complications at too early of an age;
 For the life-crushing force of racism, decade after decade, he could
 no longer face.

And there are millions upon millions of other such tragic stories
 like these of my
 uncle and great grandmother;
 Stories that grievously testify to how Blacks have for so long been
 brutally and
 horribly mistreated, even denied the divine status of being actual
 sisters and brothers.

So yes, I learned early the devastations of racism and its
 violence, tensions, and strife.
 The teachings and lessons I received from my family and
 community have strongly influenced and guided my life
 as I have always been one whose spirit has known that *the place*
 racism attempts to assign to our race is theologically incorrect and,
 indeed, spiritually wrong.
 Which is why with every breath that I exhale out as well as inhale
 in, will continue to be used ceaselessly to fight against the
 oppressiveness of this structurally racist system to help set those of
 us who are captives, Free! Free! Free!

Free in our minds and bodies; Free in our spirits and souls—
 From protests to marches to sit-ins to sitting on and hiding
 paraphernalia on the way
 to riots.
 Free to proclaim our right *to be*, be it from the sweltering heat to
 the bitter cold;
 Or, from freezing rain to the painful force and lingering sting of
 policemen's fire hoses.

So yes, I've been in the number of those of us who refuse to
 relinquish our divine birthright and inheritance or to bow down and
 acquiesce.

I have been in the number of those of us who have been and are willing, still today, to risk our lives, no matter how challenging or dangerous the test.

I have been an organizer and leader for civil, civic and human rights from the pre-dawn of morning to the pitch black of nights. From Chicago, Indiana, Tennessee and all the way down to the Delta in Mississippi, the latter a place I was run out of because I dared to speak out against every amoral practice and illegal law within it.

Chased and then confronted by a white sheriff yielding a large, flashing switchblade,
who, with evil in his eyes and venom in his heart, told me in no uncertain terms:
“You better not let the sun catch you here tomorrow morning, or you will be dead!”

Forced to pack up in the middle of the night as my husband and I drove away,
Being careful not to make the mistake of looking back as did Lot’s wife;
Leaving behind the mud and mosquitoes along with racism’s mayhem and madness
that causes its culprits to not value and respect another’s life.
It was this horrifying experience that has made me appreciate all the more why Nina Simone so powerfully and knowingly sang,
the song that so well describes Mississippi: *Mississippi God, Damn!*

But just because I was run out, has not meant that I have been run down.
For I have worked tirelessly—even when I was dead tired—to help assure that it will
be righteousness, justice, equality and Truth that will, in the end, prevail,
No matter the multitudinous times these values and principles are crucified or
crushed to the ground.

It has been because of my unyielding activism that many years ago, the punitive, vicious and vengeful system of racism resulted in my being pinned in and crushed between two cars, ironically but not coincidentally, on a car dealership parking lot.
Not even the doctor’s prediction and prognosis of immobility and impending death has been enough to stop me from showing up for a just war when God asks the question, “Whom shall I send?” For I

am ever ready and willing to speak out, even from the wheelchair I
 now, as a consequence, sit in.
 I will rise and stand up against that which tries to destroy us as a
 people; against
 that which is unjust; against that which is unfair.
 Because from the very beginning of time, my entire being has been
 gripped as
 well as equipped to fight for justice and equality.
 And no matter what and no matter where, the voices and memories
 of my ancestors— my great grandmother, my uncle, my mother
 and sister and now my father too—
 continue to compel me to take action on that which I was born to
 both be and do:

A New Afrikan Warrior Queen Mother, one who tirelessly fights
 for freedom, equality and justice so that it will benefit and bless,
 not just me, but also you.

Participant #8—TF

TF was born as a healthy, ten pounds, five ounce, bouncing baby girl fifty years ago in Baltimore's City Hospital in Maryland. She reported that her father and maternal grandmother were present to witness her birth as the second of five children. TF's father was from the South and her mother from the North. They met at a family gathering in a country setting in the South and later married at relatively young ages. TF shared that her mother's early marriage was influenced by her desire to leave home because of her mother's (TF's maternal grandmother's) alcoholism. TF's mother told how she grew up underprivileged. She had to put cardboard in her shoes to walk back and forth from school. Alcoholism was also an impetus for her father to start life on his own early as both his parents (TF's paternal grandparents) were prone to alcoholism, a disease that would continue to be passed on and be an expression of the ontological grief that plagued the family for a variety of reasons.

Things were extremely difficult for TF's parents, even after they married. While the marriage initially started out with them being supportive of one another, the stressors of life and the demands of living quickly entrapped them into the very common and vicious cycle of projecting and venting their dissatisfactions, frustrations, and anger onto one another. These dynamics became all the more cyclical, as alcohol became a part of the family scenario—just as it had been for both of them when growing up. Soon, they began to argue and fight which ultimately led to their separation (but never officially a divorce) over twenty-one years ago. Prior to their separation and fussing and fighting, TF remembered the togetherness and the love that was shared before alcohol entered the family setting and tore the family apart. She recalled family trips and outings when they would just pack up and go and do things for the summer. She used to think her parents were wealthy because they both worked hard and were in managerial positions at White companies.

TF's father taught TF and her siblings how to fish and swim, and her mother, as an excellent cook, made sure they were well fed. Her mother was the primary disciplinarian and also considered to be the more educated one since she completed high school and her father did not. They both, nonetheless, as TF stated, "instilled in us the important role education plays in your life." TF has always considered school to be a blessing from elementary school forward, despite the presence and impact of racism on her educational experiences.

Growing up at home was often very difficult for TF. She reported that she was not the favorite one in her family and that she had to stay home and clean house without the opportunity to go out or date as her other siblings, including her sisters, were allowed to do.

TF likened herself to Cinderella as she commented about her family, especially her sisters: “They made me Cinderella because they used to say I wasn’t pretty like them. I was the ugly duckling ... called ‘dark and nappy-headed’”. The pain of being treated as an *Other*, the unpredictability of drinking and violence in the home, along with the challenges and pressures of BEING in general, resulted in TF becoming what she described as “a mischievous teenager.” She became pregnant as a teen, which, she felt, further tore the family apart, especially her father whom she stated was very hurt by it. These quickly escalating and down-spiraling events of TF’s young life are directly and specifically addressed with understanding by psychologist Dr. Nicholas C. Cooper-Lewter:

Having been born like the swan that thought it was a duckling and that was negatively labeled by the ducks in the story by Hans Christian Andersen, we [African Americans] run the risk of believing we are ugly. At every turn the Legion [the spiritual warfare of racism] forced into our psyches and souls proclaim that we are ugliness personified: ugliness on the outside that causes others to fear us, and ugliness on the inside that causes us to be afraid. ... Stuck in a place where we are feared and loathed, identity-confusion is one of the ingredients of which our particular kind of ugly is made. ... Who is not clear about it? If one is an ugly duckling, life can be hell.²⁶

It was the result of TF “looking back over her life” and seeing how God had brought her “to and through” her frequently hellacious and hard times that she gave her life to Christ on July 28, 1975. She came to realize and have gratitude for the fact that, although she did not want and tried on several occasions “to not be pregnant,” that it was nothing but the grace and mercy of the Lord that saw her through that time period to have a healthy daughter who is now thirty-two, and who has given her two, beautiful grandchildren. TF’s gratitude to God has been extended to her acceptance of “the call to

²⁶Nicholas C. Cooper-Lewter, *Black Grief and Soul Therapy* (Richmond, VA: Harriet Tubman Press, 1999), 1-2,

ministry.” She is currently matriculating at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. to obtain a Masters of Divinity degree as well as pursuing ordination as an itinerant elder with the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Racism has always played a menacing role in TF’s life to include at home, church, school and work. The Salvation Army was her first church experience and involvement as a young child. It was at the Salvation Army as well where TF witnessed how Whites were the ones who were given the primary positions and leadership roles—teaching, preaching, traveling. TF stated that it was only because of her parents’ teachings that she learned that there is no racism in the love of Jesus. They taught them how Blacks were going through racism and sought to prepare them to live with it. It was because of the continued racism TF experienced and witnessed with the Salvation Army that she opted to change her church denomination.

Additionally, TF had experiences with the spiritual warfare of racism throughout her school life starting in elementary school when White children were seated in the front and Black children in the back, to when she attended a community college to obtain an associates degree in General Studies and experienced many Whites having attitudes of superiority and privilege while sometimes treating and contributing to TF and other Blacks “feeling as if they were not even human beings.” And then, there was the work experience TF had of a White male supervisor approaching her and other Black women sexually. It was the culmination of these experiences, to include being made to feel like *the ugly duckling* by her family, that TF was inspired to begin speaking out about how all people should be treated fairly and that race, nor color, should be a factor in determining how we interact and relate as human beings—*beings* all created in God’s image and

likeness. The experience with the White male supervisor resulted in TF speaking at a Senate hearing on racism and sexism in the workplace. During the hearings, the supervisor was identified and TF reported that he later went home, pulled out a gun and shot himself in the head. This tragic outcome is evidence of how the spiritual warfare of racism is destructive to all—Whites as well.

The variedness of TF's life experiences—the good as well as *the ugly*—have helped to shape and make her into who she is today which led her to make the following comment: “As far as racism goes, I have to take it one day-at-a-time. I never, ever wanted to be White; I just wish we weren't exposed to or have to deal with racism. I always got ridiculed about my nappy hair but I am so thankful today for being Black and beautiful... I am enjoying my locks. Throughout it all, my strength in the Lord has helped me to put my foot down to make sure nobody disrespects me or denies me *being* the godly queen whom I am.” TF is gifted as a dancer and committedly uses this gift to give thanks and praise to God. The researcher now shares TF's poem.

A Spirit Dancer Who Loves

My spirit danced its way into life at Baltimore City Hospital in 1958.

And for some reason, somewhere and somehow—no matter the circumstances or conditions—I have been seeking to dance my way through life every since.

For I am a soul who knows the powerful, awesome and healing love of God.

It has only been the knowing of this sacred and eternal Truth that I have been able to keep on holding on when life has become challenging, difficult and, for me personally, harder than hard.

And even though I also know I was the second of my parent's five children born,

In my heart of hearts I know I didn't truly, fully come alive until I gave my life to the Lord on July 28th in the year of 1975.

And as I look back over my life, this momentous day and decision remain my greatest joy, my greatest pride.

Especially since at one time in my life I was treated as a modern-day Cinderella, one who was made to stay at home and clean while my sisters were allowed to go out, date, have fun and pretty much do their own thing.

An *ugly duckling* I was called, nappy-headed and sometimes even that I was too dark.

But thank God, because of me turning my life over to Christ, I have learned to love myself, including my color, my graceful beauty and my hair that I now wear as locks.

But just as there is joy and pain as well as sunshine and rain, I too remember life at home, at least initially, being joyful and fun as my parents were hardworking and provided us with what we needed.

I remember the excitement of packing up clothes and food and going on different vacations, always together as a family.

My father taught us how to swim and fish, while mother emphasized education and, as an excellent cook, she taught us how to make dish after dish after dish.

But the weight of the world, especially the devastating impact of racism, apparently for them as well, eventually became too much, As my father started drinking a lot and he and Mom began to fuss and fight as well as to fight and fuss.

The tensions, stressors and unresolved pain and grief in our home resulted in me becoming a mischievous teenager.

And before I could figure out or really understand what was going on, I found myself unexpectedly and unwantingly pregnant.

It was a reality that further tore my family apart, especially my father, for it very much did, at least temporarily, wound and break his heart.

And while I couldn't hear or appreciate it from my parents then, I do realize and appreciate now,

They were concerned most about my well-being and were fearful I would not know

how to be in this challenging world,

With the responsibility of trying to care for and raise a child when I myself was

but a mere girl.

And despite the uncertainties, fears and doubts of my family as well as of those of my own,

God saw us through as I gave birth to a healthy and loving daughter.

And now today I am grateful for all that she has brought into my life, blessing me, not once, but twice to be a grandmother.

And while I became a mother at a young age, this did not deter me from pursuing additional plans or goals.

I returned to school to further my education, and most importantly, I turned to Jesus for the salvation of my soul.

For through those many years that I struggled to be a parent as well as the many tears I cried,

I never would have made it had it not been for the Lord always right there and always on my side.

It was through my relationship with the Lord that I also became more conscious of the social, political and economic dynamics around me.

Consequently, I started speaking up and out against injustices and inequalities that so pervasively prevail throughout our society.

From the streets to the classroom all the way to Capitol Hill before a senate hearing,

I have been used by God to be a voice that helps call us back to covenant relationship, one with another,

A covenant relationship that does not give consideration to race, gender, caste or class or color,

A covenant relationship that only remembers and honors the truth that we are all beings lovingly created by God and, therefore too, a family of one who are all sisters and brothers.

And now that I find myself pursuing a Masters of Divinity degree as well as ordination to become an itinerant elder within the African Methodist Episcopal denomination,

I cannot help but marvel at God's grace, mercy and goodness,

As He blesses me even as I struggle to get place-to-place, without a home to call my own, without a job, without a car.

But even in the midst of this, so great has been God's giving,

That I have to take the time in the beginning of each day,

To read God's Word, contemplate, reflect and get down on my knees and pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to fill and flood my being from the top of my head all the way down to the very tip of my toe,

For I realize I need to be totally covered by the Lord in order for me not to give up or succumb to the external, worldly pressures of spiritual warfare

So that I can instead keep trusting in God and continue to spiritually grow and grow stronger and stronger as God Himself

lifts and girds me up as He directs me to where He will have me to
 go to evangelize, preach and spread the gospel's good news,
 And you can be assured, my spirit will be dancing all the way,
 glorifying and praising God—whether I am with or without
 dancing shoes!

For I, I am a Spirit Dancer who Loves!!!

Participant #9—LD

LD was born a healthy baby in Bronx Community Hospital in New York. As an only child, he lived with his mother and, sporadically, with his father until the age of three when, due to a failed relationship between his parents, he was sent to live with his maternal grandparents in Virginia and his mother went to live with one of her sisters in Washington, D.C. LD identified the separation from his mother as being “very traumatic.” He very much wanted to be with her and although she would come to the farm in Virginia to visit, he was jubilant when, at age ten, he was finally able to live with her again when he joined her in Washington, D.C. He remained with her in D.C. until her death from breast cancer on August 23, 1978—four days after his twenty-sixth birthday.

LD's mother was born on her parents' farm in Virginia as the youngest of twenty-three children. As a young adult, she moved to New York to live with one of her older brothers and find employment. It was while living in New York that she met LD's father who, at the time, was stationed there in the Navy. The information LD has about his father is minimum. He knows that his father was a boxer whose physique was muscular and short (approximately five feet, five inches). He was originally from the Baltimore, Maryland area, however, LD knows no details about his father's childhood or the paternal side of his family. He knows that his father had a violent streak that he would

unleash on his mother. Finally, there was a physical confrontation between them that resulted in LD's departure from New York and his mother and his father's departure from their lives altogether—at least as far as he knows. LD was around twelve or thirteen when they found out that his father had been killed. The story was that it happened as a result of his involvement with a White woman, however, it was never confirmed. LD watched his mother “cry quiet tears” upon hearing the news. It did not impact LD in any particular way emotionally since he never really knew his father, he just knew of him.

Life on the farm with his grandparents and cousins was very organized and structured: they worked during the week, went to church on Sundays, and “kept their place” in the social hierarchy imposed by the spiritual warfare of racism. The farm was located in a segregated, all Black community. LD recalled how blacks could not go through the front door of this particular store to get what they wanted; they had to go to the back. While LD now knows that such restrictions were part of the blatant racism of the South, as a young person, “it was just the way life was.” There was no intellectual discussion or conversation about such stratifications or arrangements—“it was just white folks owned things.”

LD attended all Black schools and was taught by all black teachers during the period he lived with his grandparents. When he went to live with his mother in DC, a segregated, educational structure was in place as well, however, occasionally there would be a few White teachers who taught him as well as a few White students in his classes. LD, upon graduating from high school, began attending Bowie State University in Maryland as a theater major. His matriculation there was brief because after meeting Debbie Allen and other students at Howard University (HU) who were, through art and

theater, dealing with the Black experience and attacking the White establishment and empowering Black people as a counter to the racist structure in this country, LD, with enthusiasm and excitement, enrolled at HU as well. He joined the DC Black Repertoire Company, changed his major to communications and began his current day mission and passion to use communications as a tool for the liberation of our people. He became very conscious and understanding of how the media is used as a means of perpetuating and maintaining the structures and institutions in society at levels of status quo.

The more LD immersed himself into the art of communication and theater, the more he came to recognize that the media is all encompassing, to include having an impact on one's eating, drinking—on everything. He came to see and understand that if you have a structure predicated on others feeling inferior and you being superior, then in every facet of life you have to continue to remind people of that and to hammer into them every day that they are inferior and you are superior in order for them to condone the existence of your racist structured system. And it begins in the whole educational system of the schools, through religion and every aspect of media that can be used for manipulation and control. As LD contends, "Blacks are up against a power—a great, great power" in the form of the media. He recognizes that young people are being ceaselessly fed—every second, every day through music, I-Pods, the Internet, radio, television—a continuous flow of very negative views and philosophies about life and about who they, about who we are as a people. As founder and president of a multi-media institute for the past twenty-five years, LD is committed to focusing ninety-five percent of his energies, as he says, "on the solution, not the problem."

LD shared about being in DC during the riots immediately following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. He viewed the fact that he too got caught up in the group frenzy and hoopla of grabbing things as a regrettable, unconscious act. He came to appreciate that it was a time for mourning, not looting. LD thereafter, with serious contemplation and critique, examined what he was doing with his life as he posed the questions to himself: "What place do I have in all of this? What role do I play in making things better?" These and other self-reflective inquiries led him to become even more focused on making a positive contribution to overcoming structural racism and helping people, himself and others, to live from a spiritual and cultural base of knowing who you are in a way that it is not just mere words. LD, as one who would not allow himself to be or become a victim of or to the spiritual warfare of racism, established a philosophical perspective that helped him to keep it in perspective. LD affirmed the fact that no one said life was going to be easy; however, knowing that one can overcome because of the willpower and the collaborative nature of the human spirit. LD realized the necessity of studying harder, reading more, and preparing twice as much in order to change the system. And, in order to change the system, LD came to appreciate that you have to also know the system.

LD went further to streamline his philosophy as he sought to better understand and work with and within the state and status Blacks are in as Blacks seek *to be* in a society where the spiritual warfare of racism is waged and rages against them. He surmised: "I look at a segment of black America as the patient and another segment as the doctor. The doctors ... have a sense of history ... of culture ... of their spiritual selves and they tie all of that together in a sense of knowing some healthy truths, some healthy truths

[about their own] beings.... They are very well balanced. They are very well adjusted to what they are up against. They understand what needs to happen and they have had some minor and major victories that give them a sense that they are on the right path. ... As a result of these victories, they have had some breakthroughs ... that have enabled them to see beyond the negative images that the media and the structures have set up for us. They are the doctors, the physicians.

“Now the patients are the ones who don’t have a sense of history other than what has been told to them, of what has been perpetuated to them, of that which has been put in the White racist system for them to read and to understand and to look at. They eat foods that are popular that they think they are suppose to eat according to the commercials on television and all the tools that the White structure system has put out there; they fall right into it. And, as a result, they become very sick emotionally, spiritually, physically. And they fall right in line with the sense memory of the post-slavery syndrome.... There is a lineage that runs from the plantations of Georgia and Virginia and Alabama and Mississippi.... And there is a system in that lineage and it is very easy to follow it. To break the system you have to unchain your mind, unchain your thoughts, and seek something better. You have to know that there is something else and that I’m not suppose to live like this.... The lineage has to be broken and there are those of us who have broken the lineage. These are the ones I consider the doctors. The ones who have not broken it are the patients.... It is up to us who know; it is our obligation to help those who are patients. How can we rest at night? How can we sleep in a peaceful way knowing what we know [if we are a doctor]? How can we? So, [for those of us who] are going to be the doctors...we have to be the doctors and ...speak Truth to power and

[help those of us who are patients] to break the lineage [of the spiritual warfare of racism].”

LD, at age sixty, is married and has three children (one biological and two stepchildren). His ongoing quest is to be a responsible doctor, a physician who continues to help break the lineage of racism through various methods and means of communication so that, through healing, we can all *just be*. The researcher introduces you now to LD’s poem.

A Physician Who Came to Love

A deep feeler I am,
 Passionate and caring of all that God has created, including both
 woman and man.

Groomed from the onset to see beginnings where others tend to
 see ends;
 Molded and shaped to proclaim and act on possibilities,
 No matter how bleak or pained is the perceived reality or current
 condition.

For I came into the world with a definitive purpose, with a
 definitive mission:
 I came to Love.

Love is what guides and directs me through dangerous terrains and
 intended pitfalls.

Love is what sustains and protects me throughout the all-and-all of
 life’s challenges and changes,

Including those of systemic racism and its planting of many
isms and schisms
 And dissensions and divisions in the whole of society;
 However for me, I continue to feel, just as I continue to see,
 I continue to feel and see Love.

Yes, Love, for it was Love that birthed me in Bronx
 Community Hospital in New York.
 And even though my parents were separated by the time I was the
 age of three,
 Love had already been deeply instilled within me

So that when my mother took me at this time to live with my
maternal grandparents
on a farm in Virginia and she went to live with one of her sisters in
Washington, D.C.,
Although geographically separated, it was the power of love that
kept my heart open and my mind free.

Such that even though I was hurt, even traumatized by the
separation,
Love kept me looking forward to every single occasion that my
mother came to visit
until at the age of ten,
I went to live with her in D.C. and we were reunited once again.
And for the next sixteen years we stayed together, until my
beloved mother made her transition as a result of breast cancer.

But prior to joining her, the experiences I had on the farm also
stand out,
Especially my grandfather who, as a Baptist deacon, was
committed and devout.
A man who planted and harvested his crops according to the
seasons,

And no matter what was going on or attempted to get in the
way,

He was a man who made sure that there were no excuses or
reasons. Why we were not in church each and every Sunday.

And, oh, how vivid are the memories from this period of my
life!

For as I tune my ear, I can still fondly hear the old gospel songs
and feel the rhythms—

The rocking and humming to the rhythm of the songs that helped
to soothe tired and weary souls.

And I can see the tapping of the feet as the fans are fanning from
the swelter of the heat,
And the white aprons are sashaying as the music is playing and the
wine and bread are
being served for communion.

And all the while, the people are still praying after having heard
the preacher's sermon.

And then, right before your very eyes, this already-mesmerizing
ritual would turn into
the Holy Ghost as folk began to jump up and down and you would
hear all the more, the laughter, the joy as someone else would take

this time to expound words of wisdom and encouragement or to prophesy about what is to come.

And all of this came in the midst of ceaseless singing as the joy bells were indeed ringing deep in our souls for people were letting go, if only in that moment, of the stressors and strains, heartaches and pains of oppressive living.

Letting go to get *caught up in the spirit*, a spirit that validated and affirmed their very

beings until they walked out the church's door and started again seeing an image and

likeness that racism made sure was not of or about God.

But what a ritual it was! And one I got to see repeatedly, from one Sunday to the next,

When we were dressed in our best, to present ourselves once again for healing before the Lord.

Such were the experiences that punctuated my upbringing, an upbringing that still

today keeps bringing me to a place within myself that lets me know there is a power

and force in the universe greater than the worldly power of humanity.

A power and force that is divine and in order and for the highest good of all;

A power and force that created us and, no matter who or what, it remains this same power and force that keeps us free.

It is the power and force that emboldens me to speak Truth to worldly power,

especially through the vehicle of the arts and its various forms of communication.

From theater to video to radio to TV, I seek to utilize the media to actualize the gifts

and talents that have been blessedly bestowed upon me, to help uplift and make life

better for all in every situation.

For this power and force I know to be God; I know to be Love.

And it is the only purpose my gifts and talents are to be used for.

For it is Love that renews my mind and creates within me a clean heart,

Letting me know daily that structural racism and anything or anyone else that isn't about Love have no real place, have no real part in the divine scheme where only Love can and does abide.

And thus, no matter the many weapons formed to attack and destroy our beings,

Love is always right there by and on our side.
 It has been the understanding of this awesome Truth that I am
 aided in how I live my life.
 So grateful am I that I now do so without the heavy toll that can
 come from racism,
 that I do so without its heavy price.

For I have come to see that how we are in society comes down
 to basically two positions:
 Either we are sick and hurting patients or, we are helping and
 healing physicians.
 Physicians are the ones who know spiritual and cultural history;
 the ones who aren't bamboozled by the stories told by racism that
 are contrary and confusing about who and
 how we are as a people as well as why.
 Physicians are the ones wise enough and committed enough to
 expose racism for
 what it really is: Nothing but a blatant or sometimes subliminal lie.

And the exposure is not for purposes of revenge, judgment or
 retaliation,

Rather, in hope and prayer that there will be an inner
 transformation for those who have forgotten the spiritual Truth
 about themselves and instead have become the world's patients.

And patients are always in need of physicians who care enough
 to help them heal,

By helping them to remember that being a loving person in the
 world is the only
 purpose in life that's meaningful; the only purpose that's real.

And as for me, I consciously choose to be a physician,
 A physician who uses the arts as my primary means of
 communication,

To reach out to others with Love, for Love truly is my vocation.
 And I cannot rest or sleep in peace, unless daily I am taking
 seriously this responsibility
 and somehow in action fulfilling this obligation,

Whether it is with my son, stepchildren and/or other young people,
 I am called to join in with the voices and actions of others who
 have given of themselves to help those of us who are still patients;

To help break the lineage that keeps us unhealthy, wounded,
 stuck, confounded, bound.

And instead inherit and live the lineage that our ancestors knew
 and know—the lineage
 that assures us that Truth, no matter how often crushed, will
 always rise from the ground.

And it is in this liberating spirit that I am encouraged and spurred
 on by physicians like

Paul Robeson and Malcolm X and Mary McCloud Bethune and Robert Hooks and Martin Luther King Junior and Senior and Motochico, aka Vantile Whitfield and Debbie Allen and Haille Gerima and Dorothy Height and Ella Baker and the many and millions of others who have helped and are still helping to show us the way, the way to Love.

As I reflect back on my own journey, I recognize how blessed I have been in the past just as I still today am, For God placed many physicians in my life when I was not even aware that I was a very sick patient, that I was a very sick man. But thank God those whom He sent took seriously their responsibility and obligation to be a mentor, a motivator, a challenger, a friend.

Physicians who constantly armed and equipped me with tools that I now, with Commitment, use to assess, interpret and understand my environment so that through building institutions with Multi-Media, I can help lift, defend, protect and always validate and affirm, not hurt or harm, the sacredness and divineness of all life and all people.

For a deep feeler I am, Passionate and loving of all that God has created, including both woman and man. Groomed from the onset to see beginnings where others tend to see ends;

Molded and shaped to proclaim and act on possibilities, No matter how bleak or pained is the perceived reality or current condition.

For I came into the world with a definitive purpose, with a definitive mission:
I, I came to Love.

Participant #10—CM

CM is a thirty-nine year old, single male who is very active and involved in the lives of his two male children, ages sixteen and fourteen. He is the eldest of five children

and was born in Calvert County Memorial Hospital in Maryland. He reports a normal birth and that he has always been a child and person who loves to run and play. CM was very young when his family relocated to a racially mixed neighborhood in Prince George's County, Maryland. He remembered talking to White children across the fence, however, their parents had already made sure that they did not let him or other Blacks into their lives. CM also remembered that shortly after they moved in, Whites moved out. CM reports that he initially attended an all Black elementary school until around the second or third grade when he and other students were bused out of their neighborhoods to a county school formerly designated for Whites.

CM reported very few incidents that he believed were racially motivated. He recounted the experience of a White storeowner not putting money directly back into his hand and instead would slide it on the counter. Another incident was when, as a young adult, he was stopped by two White policemen, supposedly for speeding, who then wanted to search his car. CM, who had been previously informed by a cop friend not to allow a random search without a warrant, denied the policemen the authority to do so. He reportedly remained calm, just emphatic, and eventually they left without the search or with him receiving a ticket—just a warning.

CM feels he is able to manage being with diverse backgrounds of people because his parents always taught them to treat people the way you want to be treated. His parents separated when CM was thirteen with his father becoming, as he described, “just a phone call away.” CM learned responsibility early and began working at the age of seventeen. He has continued to be one conscientious about work, his health, his children, and enjoying life. While he knows that racism exists, he has been reared to not let it define

nor determine who and how he is in life. CM is a person who has been reared from the onset of his life *to be*, one could say, clear and free. The researcher now presents CM's poem.

(Researcher's Note: CM did not participate beyond the first phase of the research study and design due to reported work schedule conflicts. Thus, information on him is not as detailed, nor is there feedback from him for the latter two phases of the research project.)

Clear and Free to Love

As for me—I'm clear!
 I so know who I am and whose I am
 That I neither see nor hear
 All those projected fallacies told
 And negative images portrayed and sold about me or us as a
 people.

No, not even the centuries of inhumane treatment, massacres,
 murders
 And the horridness of chattel slavery
 Have pierced or penetrated my consciousness or made me
 relinquish the God-given reality of who I am.

For indeed I stand proud and tall upon the shoulders of ancestral
 giants

Whose courage, bravery, and inner tenacity and visible audacity
 Still today gives me and so many others opportunities too often
 denied to them,
 Opportunities that assure we have the capacity to simply *just be*!

And I was born just for this purpose:
 To simply just be me, uninhibited and free, clear and free to Love.
 And from the moment even before my birth in a hospital in Calvert
 County and as one who would become the eldest of five,

I was loved, protected and affirmed in my being,
 Not just some, but all of the time.
 Which is why it did not matter that when our family moved from
 Calvert to Prince George's,
 Whites in the neighborhood moved out because they didn't want to
 be near or around us.
 Because you see, I really do know and understand that the
 problems of racism lie within them and not within me.

For I am a loving, kind, compassionate and caring person
 Whose essence is not to be defined or determined by others.
 I am a part of that remnant God said would always remain.

My parents taught me to treat others the way I wanted to be
 treated.
 And even when others, in their own unenlightenment, fail to do the
 same,
 I know that who I am remains in tact, for the core Truth about my
 being can never be changed.

And now that I am a father I pass on these and many other
 lessons;
 Most of all I let my children know that they are a gift and, indeed,
 a blessing
 From God, the One in whom we all live and move and have our
 being
 Which is why I am not blinded by racism or kept from seeing who
 and whose I Am!

So yes, I'm clear;
 And therefore I have no fear.
 I have no fear because I am simply here to just be me,
 Uninhibited and totally free,
 Clear and free to Love.

The second phase also resulted in the researcher writing additional poetry while
 also retrieving previously written poetry from her journals and archives that rendered
 expression and meaning relevant to the ministry project. The following poems and their
 respective motivations are included as they were used during the course of the one-day
 retreat that took place in Phase Three and serve the ministry project's overall purpose: to
 identify, address, give voice to and help heal ontological grief through the expression and
 practice of love.

Motivation: The poem that follows is the first poem the researcher wrote as she
 began to immerse herself in and give definition to the intense feelings and emotions
 within her that (re)emerged during the writing of her spiritual autobiography and resulted
 in the term, ontological grief. It is thus, the first poem written specifically for and because

of this ministry endeavor to help heal the grief of and about the black BEING, and is thus placed in the beginning as the epigraph.

A Plea for Healing

So caught up was I in the worldly mundane and the easily distractible,

Until one day, in a rare moment of stillness,
I experienced what can only be described as that which the mystics call the ineffable.

And every since then I have been living in a renewed reality such that now,

Every time I look out and see the pervasiveness and unrelentingness

Of our suffering as a wronged and misguided people, I grieve.

Every time I hear of how our internal hurt, anger, pain, and shame

Have been inappropriately projected and then senselessly unleashed to attack and maim yet another sister and brother, I grieve.

Every time I feel the overwhelming weight of worldly systems and structures, and the propaganda of policies and politics all designed to seek, devour, and destroy our very existence, our very being, I grieve.

I grieve for my self; I grieve for others; I grieve for God.

Every time, every time I know that there is no grounding, no centering, no stillness in the midst of our unconscious busyness, Keeping us ceaselessly seeking but not seeing anything but illusions that keep us caught up in conflicts and confusions, I grieve.

Every time I reach out and touch the ramifications of evil symbolized, concretized, reified and then actually internalized by us as inferior and less than,

As if these really are our heritage and birthright, I grieve.
I grieve God for all the losses we have endured as a people, the millions and millions of hearts, minds, and souls
Forced into darkness and literally beaten into death because of centuries upon centuries of barbaric atrocities and countless lies told by the spiritual warfare of racism that is so heartless, that is so cold.

Yes God, I grieve. I grieve the loss of our Truth in You.
 Help us to heal this vicious cycle of ontological death and
 destruction,
 this cycle of seemingly ceaseless grief.
 Help us to heal, Merciful God, for no longer do I want every time
 to grieve.
 Help us, Oh Lord, help us to heal.
 Help us, Oh Lord, help us please.

Motivation: The engagement of this ministry project, from the onset, has been a journey that has taken the researcher to and from many places—to and from places within herself; to and from places within the hearts, minds and spirits of the participants; to and from places within the lives and experiences of those still living as well as those who have transitioned and now occupy the status and state of those we call ancestors. It has been a journey that has taken the researcher to and from the era of Civil Rights; Jim Crow; sharecropping; disenfranchisement; Black Codes; lynchings; the Underground Railroad; Fugitive Slave laws; raping; plantations; slavery; auction blocks; the Atlantic Ocean; the Middle Passage; and, to and from the shores of Africa; to and from the Door of No Return; to and from the holding cells of the dungeons; to and from a time when slavery was unknown. The next four poems have been written from the extensiveness of these travels, travels that continue to speak to the researcher in powerful, haunting, and, always, demanding ways.

But There They Were

There they were,
 In their native land
 Working, playing, dreaming,
 Talking, even walking;
 Having no idea

Evil and greed were plotting, scheming, strategically stalking them;
 Awaiting an inopportune moment,
 To snatch them, kidnap them, and even barter them
 For a few items that amounted to a mere nothing;
 Bartered from other unconscious and unevolved beings
 Who clearly were not foreseeing the breach in human relationships
 They would inevitably make
 And the bodies, minds, and souls they would destroy and take
 And ultimately forsake—forever.

But there they were.
 Shackled and chained.
 All psychologically traumatized and emotionally maimed;
 Forced into situations and conditions they could never fathom or understand:
 How could such vicious atrocities be imposed upon them by others
 Who too were created by God and supposedly a part of the one
 human race
 Called woman and man?

But there they were.
 Herded together in dark, dank, filthy, dirty holding places
 With their basic needs ignored as well as the horror and pain
 etched upon their faces.
 The brothers put in one part of a dungeon and the sisters in
 another,
 All exposed to inhumane acts without protection or cover
 From the heartlessness of those who were neither friend nor lover
 of what is decent and good and caring and kind;
 Those who could have cared less about the many souls that died or
 the countless number who did or almost lost their mind.

But there they were.
 Old, middle-aged, and young alike
 For weeks and months on end,
 Having to stand, sit, kneel, squat and sleep
 On cold, hard unyielding concrete
 Mixed with urine, tears, saliva, vomit, blood, and feces
 As the two chamber pots placed one on each end
 Couldn't even begin to hold the depths of the sins
 Committed against them

As the two-thirds who managed to endure this barbaric and
 torturous ordeal
 And actually survive

Were cruelly made to shuffle in ankle chains through the Door of
No Return,
Weak, feeble, fearful, barely alive.

But there they were.
But there they were.
But there they were.

The Middle Passage

Just a few days before
Being mercilessly ushered through the infamous Door of No
Return,
Captured men, women, and children alike—
By force and not choice—
Were made to have their heads shaved
And then, as if all else they had already gone through had not been
enough for them to battle and handle,

In order to distinguish which enslaver was immorally claiming
them as his own,
They were seared and branded as if they were mere cattle.
And then, to add insult to heinous injury,
Some were baptized prior to deportation
For it was forbidden to bring the enslaved to certain places
Without them first being christened;
And yet, how ludicrous was this most inhumane act and, indeed,
this un-Christian expectation.

Chained in pairs by the ankles
Made to shuffle with leg-irons two-by-two
Distraught, forlorn, terrified;
Yet not having a recourse or divine intervention to stop what the
enslavers' had already done, nor what they were about to do.

Then once aboard the enslaver's ship,
They were immediately nakedly stripped
Of all their dignity and yes, their clothes too.
No exceptions were made to this demoralizing rule
Whether you were feeble, frail, young, pregnant, sick or old.
A multitude of black people packed tighter than even what tight
allows

Made to exist in poorly ventilated slave holds
While having to lay and sleep on wooden planks that were hard
and also piercingly cold.
For weeks and months on end,

Smelling and having to share space with blood, vomit, stench, stale urine, dead bodies and feces;
 And if they didn't die from starvation or from being thrown overboard, they died from some kind of disease.

And in the midst of all of this, they were forced to sing and dance for amusement
 Though no merriment did they know.
 How could they but lament being in the company of evil with no idea of where or how far this evil was likely to go?
 Women were brutally forced to relinquish themselves to the savage proclivities of the sailors.

And for those who resisted and fought back, if they didn't use their own skirts to hang themselves in order to escape such a demeaning ordeal, they were severely beaten and/or thrown overboard.

The men were horrifically treated and they too would seize every opportunity to resist and also to rebel;
 Millions upon millions of God's created people brutalized, beaten, and murdered
 With stories about the Middle Passage so gruesome, only the sharks that fed on their bodies in the Atlantic Ocean can possibly tell.

An Acknowledgement to Our Ancestors

On this day and at this time, we have come together to acknowledge you—
 Each of you individually and all of you collectively. And while we do not know your names to call each one of them, we do know you in Spirit. Our Spirit knows because our own Spirits still feel today the horrors of what you experienced centuries and centuries ago. Our minds are boggled as your own had to be as we hear and know and remember the atrocious acts committed against you. Our hearts cry out in pain as your own had to as you went through the most horrendous of human ordeals. We grieve in our souls to know that you, precious Godly beings, were so desacralized, so devalued and so inhumanely mistreated.

We have come to acknowledge you and all you experienced during your existence. We remember you and we say prayers to bless the presence you had in the universe and your connection to us today as we too know what it feels like and what it means to be desacralized, to be devalued and to be inhumanely mistreated. We

cry for you as we cry for ourselves. We touch the hurt, the anger, the pain, the rage, the fury, the sadness, the loss, the losses, the grief. We touch these places, these emotions within ourselves and we remember you—each of you and all of you; the young, the old, male and female, husbands and wives and children; fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers; aunts and uncles; sisters and brothers; kings and queens. We remember you all and we give thanks for it is because of you that we are more than we would have been or could have been had you not had the strength and fortitude to endure, to resist, to rebel. We make no judgments about your responses, whether you took your own life or the life of another; whether you acquiesced because of your own despair and lost of hope or whether you constantly fought back until your last dying breath. No matter your recourse or response, because of our own continued struggles and challenges with these same evil spirits ceaselessly moving against our beings and existence today, we understand. And this is why we are here together today to acknowledge you and to give thanks for the stand you each took in your own way to affirm life, to affirm justice, to affirm hope and to affirm your divine right *to be*. To you, one and all and each and all, we give thanks. We acknowledge you. We bless you. May your spirits and souls forever rest in peace as you assist us to assure that God's justice is done and that love rules and reigns again. Ashe! Ashe! Ashe!

They Call to Us

They call to us out of the deep,
 The place where yet to be actualized souls gather,
 Awaiting fulfillment through the efforts of those of us
 Who have been blessed with opportunities
 Denied to them repeatedly throughout too many life times.

They call to us,
 Needing us to remember their deeds and acts
 As we stand taller on their shoulders
 And some even carry us on their backs,
 Enabling us to go places we could not now go
 If they had not desired them before,
 As the energies they previously expended
 Are the ones now helping to move us forward,
 Opening heretofore closed doors.

They call to us,

Hopeful that we will hear and heed their message
 That we need not continue
 To recycle the same generational pain,
 Because without learning and applying the lessons,
 There is nothing any of us stand to gain,
 If more souls keep passing on
 To gather in the deep
 And their call to us to awaken
 Is met only by more of us being asleep.

They call to us.
 They call to us.
 Let us awaken
 So that we can all be actualized
 As together we realize and be our God ordained Truth,
 For this is why they call to us.

Motivation: During the course of the researcher's search of the literature germane to her ministry project, the researcher read the documentary book she has previously referenced, *Civil Rights Chronicle: The African- American Struggle for Freedom*. This monumental and invaluable resource gives a chronological account of African people, both stolen and sold from the shores of Africa; people who have become amalgamated into what is known today as African Americans or blacks (and for some, New Afrikans; formerly Negroes) as they—through unprecedented resilience and determination—have continued to struggle against the brutal horrors of slavery and the relentless spiritual warfare of racism. This *struggle* is recounted from the 1400s when Europeans first began slave trafficking in Africa and is brought forward to today. While reading this graphic and haunting chronology, the researcher was deeply affected and moved. She was particularly moved by the following story:

Two married couples who were lynched, George and Mae Murray Dorsey and Roger and Dorothy Malcom, [who,] on July 25, 1946 ... were pulled from a car by a mob of 20 white men, who lined them up and shot them dead. John L. LeFlore, an NAACP activist

who investigated the case, called the murder the end result of a sharecropping dispute between Roger Malcom and the white man for whom he worked. Said LeFlore: 'The lynching of those four people shocked the nation.... This lynching was one of the ghastly and tragic happenings of the mid-20th century.'"²⁷

The poem that came forth to the researcher from this reading is a tribute to the *Thou* of these two couples as well as to acknowledge and affirm the *Thou* of all the millions of other Africans and African Americans (Steve Biko, Emmet Till, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., etc.) who have been senselessly lynched, mutilated, murdered, and, ontologically grieved.

Senseless Grief: An Ode to the Malcolm's and the Dorsey's

How do you hold senseless grief?
Grief caused by the debased actions of others,
Others who are supported by a state and a government
That allows racism to shoot, maim, lynch, kill
Innocent black people at white folks whim and will;
Backed by a constitution that denies justice and rightful retribution,

Especially when all could clearly see
The corpses of four, young, innocent victims so plainly;
Two young married couples pulled from a car by a mob of 20
white men,
Lined up and shot up,
Dead over and over again with more than 100 bullets shot into
their joy,
Their laughter, their hopes and their dreams;
Their right to love themselves and each other,
Slaughtered by those vicious, cruel, sickeningly mean.
And even though unmasked and their numbers known,
They, to this day, remain fugitives under white privilege
protection,
As no evidence was allowed to come forth to indict or convict
them,
Not even from that sham they called an FBI investigation.

²⁷Clayborne Carson, consultant, *Civil Rights Chronicle: The African American Struggle for Freedom*, with a foreword by Myrlie Evers-Williams (Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International, Ltd., 2003), 94.

And so, senseless grief comes. It comes claiming and
 consuming you.
 It comes confining and confusing you
 Because its source is not from that which can be deemed
 humane;
 Rather, it rises and is raised by an evil and demonic force,
 A force making those it possesses heartless, mentally inept,
 and spiritually insane.
 Senseless grief comes. It comes infiltrating and bombarding
 your body, saturating
 and sagging your soul,
 As your spirit can't help but cry out:
 Is there really an omnipresent and omnipotent God?
 And if so, why did God—if God is omniscient- make so
 many whites to be so godless,
 to be so cold?

Senseless grief. How do you hold it and what do you do
 with it
 When it becomes so much a part of your every day life—
 Causing you mental anguish and heartache, causing you
 constant struggle and seemingly ceaseless strife?

I grieve senselessly for you Roger and Dorothy Malcom;
 I grieve senselessly for you George and Mae Murray
 Dorsey.
 Maybe one day the answer will come so that none of us
 will ever have to hold,
 Not even for a nanosecond, such senseless grief again.
 Ashe! Ashe!
 Ashe! Ashe!

Motivation: The following poem has been taken from the poetry archive of the
 researcher who wrote it in memory of her parents and to their life experiences as
 African Americans who too sought *to be* in the midst of the spiritual warfare of racism.
 The researcher was brought to reflect often on her parents and other transitioned family
 members during the course of her ministry project and its research.

**For All Those Who Are Not Loved as Well as For All Those Who Are Not Loving
(A Poem For Love in Memory of My Parents)**

Little Black baby girl
 Born into a confused and rejecting world
 Grew up, met up
 With one who, like you
 Was never given the opportunity to make it through
 Life without the toils and troubles
 Of others
 Who didn't know what it meant to be a lover
 Of themselves, much less humankind.
 Just simply out of their minds
 With unnecessary hatred and false fears
 Passed on from all the yester-years
 Of lovelessness and not really believing that
 They too are beings who are blessed
 But yet—
 You keep holding on
 Hoping Love isn't totally gone

From your own heart
 As you try to part a sea
 Red with the blood of your ancestors;
 As you try to get to that oasis called the Promised Land
 Hoping that along the way someone will keep extended a
 loving hand
 But with no evidence of this continually in sight
 You feel yourself yearning for all the human wrongs to be
 made humanely right.
 And so you, kneel down, clasp your hands and begin to
 pray without ceasing
 For all those who are not loved as well as for all those who
 are not loving,
 Because you, little Black baby girl, know oh so well, that
 they are, after all,
 One and the same.

Motivation: The researcher wrote this poem as part of a continuous effort and desire to see us—all of God's created and unconditionally loved people—raise our consciousness to the Truth that we are created for Love. It is a poem written to speak Love from one Spirit to another to help us remember and also to help us BE this Truth

about ourselves, even in the midst of the worldly spiritual warfare of racism and all other
isms.

I Speak to Your Spirit Now: You Are Love!

I speak to your spirit now,
And I say to you, that "You, you are love.
Yes, love, my Beloved
Because, indeed, you *be loved* by God
As God created you in love, with love, because of love,
for the sole purpose of love.

So you, my beloved child,
One created by God,
I speak to your spirit now
And I say to you, deeply, intently, emphatically
That you, you are love.

Love is your divine birthright, your inheritance, your
legacy to keep passing on and on
And though you have been through numerous trials and
tribulations,

And even been talked about and scorned,
You, my beloved, still are love.

You have gone through a lot,
And, no, life for you, as Langston knew,
"Ain't been no crystal stair,"
But climb you have, my Beloved, steadily striving for the
top,

Striving against many obstacles and barriers,
Some even intentionally placed in your way to block and
even to try to stop
the divinely brilliant being that you are.

Even when situations and conditions only looked bleak
and felt, oh so dreary,
There was that something within that would not allow you
to completely give in,
And so you kept on pushing,
Just as you kept on coming like Sterling's *strong men*,
You kept on coming back to what is real about who you are

Despite the many odds against you, deep, deep, deep
down inside,

While hoping and believing,
You were able to keep on feeling, just as you were able
somehow to keep on seeing
What many in society were trying to deny as well as
ceaselessly trying to hide
And that, my Beloved, is that you, you are love.

And so, although life for you has too often been hard and
challenging

As well as inequitable, unfair and unjust,
I speak to your spirit now Beloved, and so, hear me you
must:

You are not that which the world says and even tries to
portray
With negative images and symbols that fail to remotely
resemble
Who, how and why you really are as only God could and
did create you to be,
So hear me now, beloved, in the depths of your being,
And finally set your worldly captured and tormented mind,
heart, soul and body free.

Lay down your burdens,
Caste aside all your troubles and cares,
Breathe in the Spirit of God that gave you life,
No longer bothering to hold back the tears
Accumulated over years and years of racial mistreatment
and the painful hardship
Of merely trying *to be* in a racist and too often inhumane
society.

But take a good look at your internal image,
One that has not and cannot ever change, even with the
passage of time,
Let yourself let go, and feel the joyful release that comes
from hearing God say,
“My Beloved, you still are mine.”

So, yes, I am speaking to your Spirit now and I want you to
totally and completely hear,
You, my beloved, are love,
And no matter what you’ve gone through in life,
You are forever, as you have always been,
Sacred, divine and precious dear.
Why? Because you, Beloved child created by God

So please, yes, ask me what I'm doing so I can certainly and
 unashamedly tell you:
 I am wooing and pursuing the Black Being with Love!

Motivation: This last shared poem (previously cited in Chapter I) is written out of
 the researcher's desire for spiritual and ontological transcendence, peace, and yes, rest—
 rest that is universal and, indeed, final.

Finally, Rest!

How do we come to know ourselves?
 Our purpose for being,
 Our purpose for seeing
 Beyond stereotypes and labels
 That seek to confine us
 But not accurately define us
 In accordance with our capacity
 Or our innate tenacity
 To spread our wings and fly
 Ever so, so high
 Over customs and norms
 That fail to help us perform
 The responsibilities and roles
 That touch us deep in our souls
 As we come into truth and know
 What it means to be made, both male and female,
 In God's likeness and image,
 So that the psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual angst
 We too often experience can be finished
 And, like God, we can see that everything made is *very*
good.
 And we, again, like God, can all finally get some rest!

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

The researcher begins her reflections by saying, “Merciful God, what an undertaking!” It has been a *heavy* process, as it has required the researcher to go beyond the words being written to touch the place and purpose from which and for which they have emerged. That place was one where much accumulated grief had gathered and the purpose was for it to be acknowledged, heard, felt, understood, and finally, to be healed. Ontological grief—what is it really and what causes its manifestation? Clearly, as a grief state that indicates the loss of knowing and loving the true nature and essence of our being, ontological grief serves as a spiritual and social barometer that gauges just how obedient we are (and are not) to the commands and call to us to love—God, self, and others.

The researcher began this ministry journey—a journey that has resulted in the development of the ministry model, *Resurrection of An Image*—with great pain, sadness, and anger as she explored the depths of the unloving treatment she, her parents, and other people of African ancestry have received throughout society—unloving treatment that has spanned centuries. There were times when the historical (and present) realities of African American life as a collective became overwhelming. Particularly haunting were the literature reviews that required the researcher to read historical accounts of the Middle Passage; of the inhumanness of the so-named *peculiar*, and the researcher adds,

the pathological institution of slavery; of the horrors of the physical mutilations, castrations, and lynching's of Blacks; of the helpless and defenseless and pathetic cries of women as they went unheard and unheeded by men who deemed and treated them worse than animals but yet did not hesitate to see them as women when they wanted to rape them. This list could go on and on but the point to be made is that deep within the researcher resided much grief about these egregious and, in the majority, unacknowledged and unattended deaths to the psyches, hearts, minds, and souls of God's people.

But then—in the midst of the heaviness and the pain and the sadness and the grief—there was God. God—who kept showing up throughout this process to remind the researcher of her own humanity. God—who kept showing up to remind her of her own purpose and of her own responsibility—no matter what—to love. Oh, the great challenge and the simultaneous necessity it has been to love! It was for this reason that the researcher opted to use the terminology of *the spiritual warfare of racism* rather than the traditional and standard term, *racism*. It was necessary for the researcher to keep putting into spiritual perspective what this war really is all about that is waging and raging against Blacks and other people of color particularly, and against humanity generally. The researcher had to continually remind herself of the words of the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”¹

The researcher had to continuously tell herself that racism is spiritual warfare and that to meet its perpetrators with more anger, hatred, and unlovingness only served to reinforce racism's evil and detrimental presence, rather than to help heal and transform it

¹Eph 6:12.

and its victims, as well as its perpetrators, with love. The researcher had to, therefore, keep writing and saying “the spiritual warfare of racism,” even when it began to sound, to her, redundant and, at times, ridiculous. She did so to keep her heart open to love and to better appreciate Jesus’ words when he hung on the cross and prayed for his persecutors, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”²

It was very important for the researcher to *not be* responsible for contributing more of the unlovingness and even hatred that we as humans have come to socially spew because our failed triune love relationship with God, self, and others. The researcher knew the ministry model she desired to put forward would serve no real, or meaningful, or even healing purpose if her own energies of anger from unresolved grief served as the catalyst to carry the project forward. So, throughout this Doctor of Ministry journey, the researcher has had to keep coming back to love in the midst of the plethora of contrary feelings and emotions and thoughts as well as desired actions she has sometimes experienced.

The researcher began the design phase of her research project with the aim of testing the research question: What difference will it make to express love through the use of poetry, ritual, and hospitality to help heal the grief of and about the Black being? The researcher was particularly focused on the residual and pervasive impact the spiritual warfare of racism has had and continues to have ontologically on those whom it ruthlessly and relentlessly targets. The researcher’s primary goal has been and continues to be to implement a ministry project that—with and through love—helps to heal and restore, i.e., resurrect, the true image and purpose God intends for our existence by facing

²Lk 23:34.

and transcending the negative realities and ramifications resulting from the spiritual warfare of racism (as well as all other *isms*).

The ministry project endeavored to accomplish its stated goal by using love as the means to transcend the spiritual warfare of racism's ontological tendency to re-image and re-name Blacks *to be* viewed and treated as an Other (other than who God created Blacks *to be*) while limiting Blacks relational contexts to those of I-It. Love was intentionally and naturally used in every moment of engagement with the participants in order to re-affirm and re-establish the I-Thou relationship and to expand the relational context in which dialogue and interaction occurred without superficially imposed limitations.

The de-naming or the categorizing of one's *being* to that of Other is the ontological reductionism that occurs when an I-Thou relationship is reified to an I-It relationship as recognized by Buber. The researcher's ministry project was, indeed, about taking a stand in *sacred* relation with others—not with an Other, not with other Its, but with other Thous. To this end, the result of utilizing a qualitative research design proved invaluable as the researcher further investigated and explored the spiritual and theological position that when we, as God's creations, fail to stand and *be* in sacred relation with God, self and others, our spirits—the very nature and essence of our existence—grieves, hence, the naming of the grief phenomenon the researcher explored as ontological grief. Ontological grief is grief that can be and only will be healed by and with God's Truth and God's love as expressed in our sacred relationships one with another. Consequently, during the implementation of her ministry project, the researcher viewed and constantly

held love as an ontological and relational imperative—an imperative that allowed for the sacredness of I and Thou *to be*.

Now that the ministry project has been implemented and the results obtained, the researcher clearly knows that being love and expressing love, through both words (poetry) and deeds (ritual and hospitality), did and can make (1) a positive difference as people are treated with dignity and respect and their personhood is seen, acknowledged, and heard; (2) a self-enhancing difference as people are supported to validate and affirm themselves as well as view the *image* of themselves more from a godly, rather than a worldly, perspective; (3) a gratifying difference as value and meaning are affixed to the experience and participants have a deepened appreciation for their BEING and the BEING of others; and, (4) a synergistic difference as the positive, self-enhancing, and gratifying experiences are passed on and shared with others, thus, increasing the possibilities for the beloved community.

Additional outcomes and results of the ministry project have been provided by the co-research participants and are collected as part of the research data (Appendix H). A sample of their feedback is included here for in the researcher's view—and as the research data confirmed—only the participants can best tell their own experiences and stories and, definitely, their voices need to be heard, not silenced, as their following testaments affirm:

- It [the ministry project and the poem] reminds me of my need to keep unplugging from the precepts and dictates of racism on my life.
- I am working on not proving myself and instead, just being myself. The [initial] interview highlighted for me just how much I was internalizing the negativity of racism. A question that stood out for me was when you the

researcher] asked, “Whom did you tell? Who knew what you experienced and what you went through?” I realized so much of it—the anger, the frustration, the pain, the grief—I never talked about it. So now, I am consciously not internalizing it.

- When we first moved here [in a majority white, upper middle income, affluent neighborhood], I wanted to prove that I was worthy to be in the neighborhood [as a Black person, a Black family]. I went around speaking, talking, visiting, helping, showing, demonstrating my skills which most have been amazed at. I realize now—and this experience has helped me to do so—that I don’t have to *prove myself*, rather I just need *to be*.
- Although the poem paints a near perfect picture of [me], it invokes a desire now to live better, be more forgiving, less critical of others, continue to look for the good in others and share, when I can, my great fortune.
- Maximize new inner peace prompted by these [poetic] words so arranged to cause me to take stock/inventory of my past arming me with weapons I did not realize I possess to help me deal with my own *ontological grief*.
- After reading my poem today I thought about the impact it has had on me during my day. I went shopping, got gas and waited in line for a while to get my car inspected and emission checked. During each of these activities I encountered some form of racism, bigotry and ill will toward me as I tried to just be a normal person wanting to get his business done. In each instance I thought about my poem and how it described me. I didn’t get angry as I normally do when these things happen. I just smiled within and thought about how strong I am to get over these ... treatments I have suffered. Now, I have a new way of dealing with these poor souls who have nothing else better than to be evil or negative toward their fellow man. I sigh a breath of relief—Ashe! Ashe! Ashe! Ashe!
- This is becoming my daily devotion period. I look forward to reading my poem. I feel good. Ready to take on the world with a renewed strength. Knowing now I can’t be stopped, I want to do more for the good of mankind. I wonder why this good fortune has been given to me – that is meeting [the researcher]. Halleluiah, Sweet Jesus!

- *Being* has never occurred to me as it has now. My goodness, what powerful beings we could be, if only we could love and help each other.
- I have had the tendency to take other people's issues and make them my own. If something happened between us that was controversial or challenging, I would look at myself to see what it was about me that caused it or saw myself as the one with the problem. Or, around Whites I was always trying to prove or show them I was just as good as or better. I realize now, as a result of the [initial interview], I don't have to do this. I just need to be who and how I am. I still do it sometimes, but I'm now more aware of it and I'm working on it.
- I realize how blessed I am.
- Love surrounds me. I'm experiencing so much more calmness; not allowing others' mess to upset my space, not claiming their negativity.
- What I have come to see is that there has been/is a reaction to this racial structure. It entails not only emotional dislike, but at the same time, I recognize for me, it was a reaction to the image they hurled against me. The emotional dislike was due to the images they, the system, the structure of White domination, hurled at us, at me. The social structure was like a giant, a Pharaoh to use biblical language. It is what Frantz Fanon talks about in *Black Skins, White Masks*. I had the conflict which most people like me have.
- The poem helped me to reflect more on this process – the maintenance of racism as a structure. It exposes, gives a lot of credence to double consciousness in that you can't serve two masters.
- In this racial structure, the way I see it, there are two basic responses: (1) the response to images; or (2) a creative response. The creative response is what helps us to fight against it and even free ourselves from the domination. The response to the images keeps us bound and being controlled and dominated.
- We are created for social relationship, for communication and connection, one with another. We do not and cannot

exist alone, nor can we alone validate and affirm our being or existence.

- This [the research experience, the interview, the poem] is helping me to realize that the more I get out, the better I feel. There is more of a release knowing that I'm able to share rather than keep it all inside of me.
- The poem for me, to hear those life changing moments summed up like that was just, Wow! All I could think about was freedom, just being free. Just all that struggle with the internal and external, but all the time I'm really free to be, to be love. Not just to experience it, but to be it... You highlighted the significance of my life experiences. It kind of took me by surprise. You don't hear your life given back to you in this kind of way.
- (Begins to cry) I'm in touch with the emotions, the feelings; that in the midst of all of that we went through, that I went through, that I am worthy, that I have value. I could hear the value of life in my story.
- [Researcher] you really have a gift for listening.
- The most important thing for me is the faith and trust that you have can help you overcome it [racism]. You have the opportunity everyday to make it not be who you really are. I don't have to keep dragging it on.
- (Crying) We have to find a way to know the image of God, then we will stop killing each other. They [young people] will pull their pants up and stop emulating the prison culture to where they're being directed.... We don't see the God in us enough to know who we are. We are so caught up in material things—cars, homes, money. We need to change our focus and our values.
- After reading my poem, I cried a bucket of tears...
- (Crying) God is just awesome! As I listened, I thought that it [the poem] would be nice to read as a eulogy piece at my funeral. When I focus on the goodness of God, I know He has done miraculous things in my life. Yes, I may be without a lot, but I am so blessed.

- I thank you [researcher] for studying me, for researching me. I'm thankful for being a part of this connection.
- After reading about me, tears streamed down my face. It is as if I had pressed rewind on the remote control button on my life... Reading this poem has opened my eyes and heart... My poem has shed light on some skills I'm not even using... That's new found confidence for me.
- It [the research experience and the poem affirming who I am] makes me grateful to have lived, to be alive; grateful to have a soul. I can't imagine not *being*!
- In the beginning and in the end there seems to be love... I desire to know more about what love is.
- Thank you, thank you for taking me back and for reminding me of who and why and what I am ... love.

The responses and *testimonies* of the participants clearly bespeak a ministry project that has and is continuing to make a positive and *yearned* difference in people's lives. The most important result, by far, is that there are now at least eleven more of God's beloveds (the ten participants and the researcher) who are now more conscious of, more caring about, and more committed to healing the ontological grief within them in order *to be* their image of God in the world—an image that is always and only about love.

The researcher has reached as a result of implementing this ministry project seven additional conclusions. The first conclusion is that language poses a critical challenge when retrieved from and controlled by an oppressive structure and system committed to maintaining worldly status quo and not the creation of "heaven on earth" via the beloved community. The definitions and symbolisms associated with the former language are typically very limiting and, if kept within its confines, constrict the charting of new territories to explore and engage as well as to redefine and "resurrect" oneself

beyond the labels and stereotypes traditionally associated with the vernacular of this system.

Such was the case for the researcher from the onset of her ministry project. Because racism is such an emotional and reactionary expletive, the researcher sought to use it as infrequently as possible as standalone terminology. Also, knowing that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places,”³ the researcher continuously sought to keep the ministry project and the issues inherent within it, (slavery, ontological grief, racism, etc.) in theological perspective. Hence, the researcher’s repeated usage of *the spiritual warfare of racism*.

The researcher concurs with McPhail who contends that “the language that we use to talk about racism implicates us in its perpetuation, and that we will ultimately need to articulate what Cornel West describes as a ‘new language of empathy and compassion’ if we are to move beyond reducing racism to material and ideological problematics, and instead recognize it for what it is: a problem of moral and spiritual incoherence.”⁴ The language of *black being* is recognized by the researcher to be a theological misnomer as our color never did and never will define or determine our spiritual or ontological essence. It indeed bespeaks *the problem of moral and spiritual coherence*.

The defining of ontological grief as a phenomenon that can be experienced by all people when there is a loss of Truth about their true image and a loss in the triune love relationship they are created and commanded to have with God, our Self, and others, is

³Eph 6:12

⁴Mark Lawrence McPhail, *The Rhetoric of Racism Revisited: Reparations or Separation?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), x.

purposely Theo-centric. The concluding point for the researcher is this: unless people are able to engage discourse and actions with one another that are centered in the love of God and result in them actually being loving, the efforts have been for naught as they would only be, just as the love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 reminds them, “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal,”⁵To articulate a “new language of empathy and compassion” suggested by Cornel West as the above commentary by McPhail infers, one has to constantly work at and on *being* empathic and compassionate—for as within, so without.

The researcher, throughout the course of this project, has had to keep going inward to address and deal with the intensity of the emotions and feelings she has had about the abusive and unjust experiences and treatment of people of African ancestry (as well as all others). The ministry endeavor demanded her processing and working through intense thoughts and feelings of anger and rage as well as the desire to see revenge come to the perpetrators of the spiritual warfare of racism. The spiritual demand for the researcher *to be* love—not to just talk about love or yearn for love or wish for Love—was unrelenting. The researcher had *to be* love within herself so that she could write love poetically; so that she could plan and implement love as it manifested into a one-day retreat where participants were extended service through loving hospitality.

The researcher realized that if her thoughts, feelings, and emotions were not properly handled and transformed, they could have ended up being more destructive to her research efforts than constructive. The intent of this ministry project is to bring healing through love to those experiencing the pain and woes of ontological grief so that they can lovingly choose to portray and be the image of God in (and not of) the world. In identifying and defining both *ontological grief* as well as *the spiritual warfare of racism*,

⁵1 Cor 13:1b

the purpose is not to cause more human divisions, dissensions, and schisms. It was not to stay focused or stuck on or in the problem. It is not to engage the bashing of others. Rather, it is merely and solely and completely to love—God, self, and others—by speaking the truth about our current conditions and conditionings so that, together, they can be transcended. Out of a genuine commitment to human healing and peace, this ministry project is a vehicle by which God's people can come together in a sacred and ritualized space so that they can practice (agape) love together until they get and make love right by being Love.

Secondly, in the midst of ontological grief, God has formed and created humans in such a way that we continue to yearn and to reach out to love and for love—primarily through communal relationship. The researcher heard and witnessed the resiliency and transcendent nature of the ten participants who served as co-journeymen with her on this research project. The researcher noted how present and prevalent paradox was throughout the variously shared experiences. No matter how far down, back, or out participants' may have felt, or even were made to feel, there was always heard or seen evidence of the formidable within getting up, coming back, and choosing to transcend it all to enter a bigger and better place and space for their being—no matter how grievous, no matter how challenging and hard the circumstances and conditions. This resilient reality is indeed a testament to God imaging us in God's likeness.

Third, love truly is the most powerful and transformative force in the universe and when it is expressed *with sincerity* and thus *without hypocrisy*, people respond, as did the

participants to the love expressed by the researcher through the usage of poetry, ritual, and hospitality.

Fourth, the capacity to love always implies, as well as requires, the capacity to forgive. Forgiveness of those who seek to hurt and harm and even oppress and persecute others is necessary in order for love to truly be actualized. The extent of love's call to forgive was best demonstrated by Jesus who, while dying on the cross, asked God to forgive His accusers and persecutors for Jesus realized "they [knew] not what they were doing."⁶ Jesus also instructs us, through Peter, that the need for forgiveness of one another is perpetual, not just seven times, but "seventy times seven."⁷ It is only love that can help one to see clear enough, as Jesus did, to forgive, an act that is even more beneficial, perhaps, to the one who forgives than the one forgiven.

Fifth, all spirits, all *beings* need to be validated, affirmed, and loved on a regular, consistent, and daily basis. The world is intentionally not structured to corroborate the truth of who humans are and, consequently, they must consciously and committedly engage actions and practices for themselves and also with others who do.

Sixth, there is an ongoing need for places, for community and cultural retreat centers like Taranga House where there is focused attention to retreat and practice the essence of being love. Just as Jesus left the multitudes in order to retreat and have spiritual communion with God, so do people need to make the spiritual practice of retreating a regular part of their spiritual discipline. Retreating provides opportunities to be rejuvenated and renewed in relationship with God, self and others. We need the

⁶Luke 23:34a

⁷Matt 18:21-22

spiritual discipline and practice of retreating to be reminded to remember that God created and imaged us out of love, solely for the purpose of love.

Seventh, there is a value to a ministry project like *Resurrection of An Image*. There is the need to show and give love to people for no other reason than just because they are created and unconditionally loved by God. The use of hospitality, ritual and poetry are powerful tools in which to express love in the world. Each provides the opportunity to creatively utilize gifts bestowed by and skills blessed by God for the sole purpose of heeding and honoring the two greatest commandments, which summarily states: We must love the Lord our God with everything God has given us as well as made us *to be* and we must love the Thou of our neighbors just as we love the Thou of ourselves.

This ministry endeavor truly assisted the researcher to more intimately and intensely know and love the Thou of all the participants and of herself as well. The journey has been one of reflection, remembrance, restoration, and reverence. The opportunity afforded the researcher to share her gifts of poetry, ritual, and hospitality shall forever remain sacred. With these blessings held in heart, mind, and soul, the poetic words of Nikki Giovanni captures the heart-thrust of *Resurrection of An Image*:

Of the many foundations upon which humans rest, words are probably the most solid.... But words without heart, without emotion, without passion are themselves less meaningful. Words need to combine with words to make not a better word but a more meaningful metaphor. Poetry. When arrogance calls it should always be poetry that answers thereby granting a stay to humankind's feelings for omnipotence. When love calls it must be poetry that answers bringing the sweet perfume of gentleness as our hearts pound and pound; when courage calls it will always be poetry that answers as we rise above ourselves to bring about a better thing. When war calls, poetry is the only answer. Poetry says

NO to destruction and Yes to possibility. Poetry is a good idea. A good friend. A good neighbor. Let's write poems.⁸

The research results of *Resurrection of An Image* clearly show that the use of poetry, ritual, and hospitality in a retreat setting that focuses on being attentive to and loving of all participants is extremely positive and beneficial ministerially for personal, small groups and corporate gatherings. While the focus of this particular research project was on identifying, addressing and helping to heal the grief African Americans experience about their beings as a consequence of the spiritual warfare of racism, the model's design can easily be adapted to meet the needs of different contexts as well as different issues, needs, and populations. The one variable that will remain constant for all who choose to use this model, however, is love. The researcher strongly believes that the research outcomes are as positive as they are because love was held as a constant throughout the research process and helped make talking about a difficult issue, the spiritual warfare of racism and its frequent aftermath of ontological grief, much easier, insightful, and beneficial.

The co-researchers reported—in different ways and for different reasons—being deeply, powerfully, and profoundly moved by the experiences they had during the course of the three-phase, qualitative research model used by the researcher. As their feedback indicates (Appendix H), profound insights, releases, revelations, and transformation occurred as participants were supported with love as they opened themselves to talk about the uncomfortable and often painful reality of the spiritual warfare of racism and the direct impact it has had on them over the course of their lives. The use of poetry did, indeed, prove to be an invaluable tool used during the implementation of this research model.

⁸Nikki Giovanni, *Acolytes* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 26.

The creativity of poetry allowed the researcher to hear, address, and respond to the individual stories and needs of each participant by literally and poetically speaking love into their hearts, minds, bodies, souls, and spirits. Both ritual and hospitality complemented and contributed to this process as each modality helped to make it possible for the researcher to respond to the needs of participants in even more diverse and specific loving ways.

Resurrection of An Image is a ministry model that was from the onset and still remains committed to validating and affirming the true identity and image of African *Americans as created in and sustained by God. By naming the spiritual forces that have* sought for centuries to demonize and devalue the race, color, and features of people of African ancestry as the spiritual warfare of racism, the problem has been shifted to the proper battleground for truly we do not wrestle against flesh. By naming the absolutely devastating consequences of the spiritual warfare of racism's unfortunate success as ontological grief, the solution is clearly established: learn to love the being that God has created all to be and be it!

APPENDIX A
INTRODUCTORY RESEARCH LETTER

INTRODUCTORY RESEARCH LETTER

Date: _____

Dear _____:

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research, which focuses on the experience of *BEING* as an African American in a structurally racist society. I highly value the unique contribution you can and, undoubtedly, will make to this research study. I am excited about your participation and, indeed, look forward to it. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information about the scope of this undertaking and to secure your signature granting written permission for your participation in this study on the attached participation-release form.

The research model I am using is qualitative whereby I am interested in and seeking to obtain comprehensive depictions and descriptions of your (and other participants') experiences with the research focus identified above. In this way I hope to illuminate and better understand the answer to the research question being posed: What is the experience of *BEING* as an African American in a structurally racist society? The desire is to be able to talk and share in-depth with other African Americans about what it has meant and what it means to navigate and manage the essence and nature of one's existence, i.e., *BEING*, in mind, body, heart, soul and spirit within an all-encompassing social structure and system that has been historically founded and ceaselessly implemented based on racist philosophies, principles, policies, and practices, all of which in some capacity and manner have been directly and/or indirectly targeted against one's highest good and best self, again, against one's very existence, against one's very *BEING*.

For the purpose of this research project, the primary racial focus will be on *structural racism*. I will utilize the definition of structural racism as provided by lawyer-activist and founder/director of the Center for Social Inclusion (CSI) in New York City, Maya Wiley, in an essay she contributed to the National Urban League's annual publication (since 1987), *The State of Black America 2006* entitled, "Hurricane Katrina Exposed the Face of Poverty." Wiley contends the following about structural racism:

Our structural arrangements [in the U.S.]-the interaction and interrelationship of our institutions-create pathways to opportunity for some and block the path to success for others. Education, housing, healthcare, banking, transportation, etc., are all systems and institutions that make up the structure of our society. They have never operated neutrally and work together to create and preserve pathways to opportunity for many whites while creating a labyrinth almost impossible to escape for many people of color. We have eliminated legalized racial discrimination against people of color, but have left the structures it produced intact. This is structural racism.... Structural racism has five primary characteristics: 1) it is not race neutral; 2) history matters in that the structure of our society has been constructed over time and racial hierarchy has been an

integral part of that restructuring; 3) effects matter because they tell us how the structure operates so that intentional bad acts are irrelevant; 4) racial disparities are effects that show the structure does not operate neutrally; and 5) everyone is harmed by the structure, even if we see it most glaringly in majority people of color communities (144-145).

Through your participation as a co-researcher, it is my hope and prayer to better understand the essence of this phenomenon of *BEING* as an African American in a structurally racist society as it reveals itself in your experience. You will be asked to recall specific episodes or events in your life in which you have experienced this phenomenon that we will be exploring and investigating together. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what this experience has been like for you, inclusive of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experience. You may also wish and are encouraged to share with me personal logs or journals or other ways in which you have recorded and sought to deal with, record, vent, and validate your experience—for example, in poems, short narratives, artwork, or in letters—over the course of previous and current years.

Our time together will be very structured and intentional with openness to flexibility as the unexpected and unplanned surfaces as it specifically relates to our phenomenon of study and focus. An interview guide will be utilized and serve as the structuring format for our dialogue and exchange. The intent and goal are to maximize our time together so that it will be beneficial and meaningful for both of us as well as to provide invaluable insight and illumination to others as we hone in on this specific phenomenon.

Your commitment of time, energy, and effort to this research project and its potential implications and, prayerfully, positive impact for others is very much appreciated. If you have any questions before signing the participation-release form attached, please let me know so we can discuss and address them to your satisfaction. Also, please feel free to contact me as needed at 301-292-2771.

With Gratitude and Much Prayer,

Janae Moore
 Primary Researcher
 Doctor of Ministry Program
 United Theological Seminary
 Trotwood, Ohio

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT-RELEASE AGREEMENT

PARTICIPANT-RELEASE AGREEMENT

I agree to participate in a research study focused on the experience of *BEING* as an African American in a structurally racist society as described in the attached letter. I understand the purpose of this study and am participating voluntarily. I grant permission for the data of this study to be used in the process of completing a Doctor of Ministry degree at United Theological Seminary in Trotwood, Ohio by Janae Moore, which will include a dissertation and any other future publication. I understand that my name and other demographic information will not be used which might specifically identify me.

I agree to meet at the following location: _____
for an initial interview of 1.5 to 3 hours, and to be available at a mutually agreed time and place for an additional 1 to 1.5 hour individual interview and/or a 4 to 5 hour group interview/focus group meeting with all other participants in this study, if necessary. Any changes in location and/or time will be discussed and agreed upon prior to implementation. I also grant permission for the tape recording of the interview(s), both individual and group.

Research Participant

Date

Primary Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire is designed to obtain demographic information on all volunteer participants in the research project, "Resurrection of An Image." Please answer all of the questions and remember, there are no right or wrong answers, only what is true for you. All responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Your time and commitment to this research project is very much appreciated. Thank you.

1. AGE _____
2. GENDER ____ Male ____ Female
3. RACE/ETHNICITY:

____ African American	____ African	____ Native American
____ Hispanic/Latino	____ European American	____ Pacific Islander
____ Asian American	____ West Indian	____ Other _____
4. MARITAL STATUS:

____ Single	____ Married	____ Divorced
____ Separated	____ Remarried	____ Widowed
		____ Cohabiting
5. PARENTAL STATUS:

Children ____ No ____ Yes # _____ Ages _____
6. EDUCATION: (highest level completed)

____ Below High School	____ High School	____ GED	____ Associates
____ College (Bachelors)	____ Graduate (Masters)	____ Post-Graduate (Doctorate)	
7. EMPLOYMENT:

____ Fulltime (30-40+ hours weekly)	____ Part-Time (less than 30 hours weekly)
____ Unemployed	____ SSI/Disability
	____ Retired
8. OCCUPATION: (if retired, former occupation)

Position/Title _____ Discipline/Field: _____

of Years in Current Job _____ Total Years Employed: _____
9. RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION:

____ Christian _____ (specify denomination)	____ Islam	____ Judaism
____ Catholic	____ Jehovah's Witness	____ Atheist (believe God does not exist)
____ Agnostic (unsure of God's existence)	____ Other _____	(please specify)

10. HOW RELIGIOUS DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE?:

☐ Very Religious ☐ Moderately Religious ☐ Not Religious At All

11. TYPE OF RESIDENTIAL AREA YOU CURRENTLY RESIDE IN:

☐ Urban/Inner City ☐ Suburban ☐ Rural ☐ Other (specify)

12. RESIDENTIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD:

☐ All African American (AA) ☐ All European American (EA) ☐ Mixed (mostly AA)
☐ Mixed (mostly EA) ☐ Diverse (mixture of races) ☐ Other _____ (specify)

13. HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION: (check all that apply)

☐ Self only ☐ Spouse ☐ Spouse/Children ☐ Children ☐ Friend
☐ Parent/s ☐ Siblings ☐ Grandparent/s ☐ Partner ☐ Other (specify)

14. HOUSEHOLD INCOME: (annually)

☐ 0-25,000 ☐ 25,000- 50,000 ☐ 50,000 – 75,000 ☐ 75,000 – 100,000
☐ 100,000 – 150,000 ☐ 150,000- 175,000 ☐ 175,000-200,000 ☐ 200,000+

15. AREA YOU SPENT MOST OF YOUR EARLY LIFE: (Name city/state or country)

☐ South _____ ☐ North _____
☐ Mid-West _____ ☐ West _____
☐ Country Other than U.S. _____

16. RESIDENTIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF FORMER NEIGHBORHOOD:

☐ All African American (AA) ☐ All European American (EA) ☐ Mixed (mostly AA)
☐ Mixed (mostly EA) ☐ Diverse (mixture of races) ☐ Other _____ (specify)

Date: _____

Initials: _____

APPENDIX D
THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following questions and thematic points will serve as a guide as we fully engage in dialogue to address the question that underlies this research project: What is the experience of *BEING as* an African American in a structurally racist society?

I. Pre-Conception to Birth

What do you know about the life of your family prior to your conception and birth? Who was the family griot/storyteller/historian? Who had the responsibility or, who took the responsibility to pass on the stories that helped to make your family who and how they were and are? How did these stories influence who and how you are? How did your parents meet? What was life like for them before you were conceived and born? Where did they live? Who did they live near – parents, siblings, other extended family members? Where did they work and what type of work did they do? What was their financial situation? Did they have other children prior to your birth and, if so, how many and what were their ages? Was your birth planned? How did your mother feel about the pregnancy? Did she receive pre-natal care during your pregnancy? How did your father feel about the pregnancy? What do you know about the circumstances of your actual birth? Day? Time? Who was present? How long was your mother in labor? Where were you born – in a hospital, a clinic, at home? Who assisted with your delivery – a nurse, a doctor, a midwife? What was your health status as a newborn? What was your birth weight and height? As you now reflect on this early beginning period of your life and the situation of your family, what stands out significantly for you as it relates to race and racism?

II. Birth to Age Twelve (0-12)

When and what do you first remember about yourself as a child? Why does this particular memory stand out for you? What other childhood memories do you have? Are these things you actually remember or, are they things you heard about or were told by others? What was growing up in your household like? Did your parents have other children after you were born? How many more and what are the age differences between? How were you made to feel as a child? Who made you feel special and loved? How did your parents “parent” you? What were some of the rules and policies they had that you had to follow? Who was the primary authority figure in the house? Who was the disciplinarian? How were you disciplined? Who else was involved in helping to rear you besides your parents – grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings? What were the relationships like with your extended family on both your mother’s and your father’s side of the family? What was the relationship like between your mother and father? Were they openly loving and affectionate with one another? Did they argue and fight? How did they resolve conflict between them? What did they do to have fun? What did you do as a family to have fun? How did they deal with and manage stress? Did your parents talk about themselves? Did they seem to be comfortable with who they were? When did you first know you were considered what is called today an African American or a Black person? Do you remember being told? If so, who told you and how were you told? Why were you told at the time you were

told? What do you remember about racial issues and matters at this age as they affected you, your family, your neighborhood? What do you remember about first attending school? Did you attend a segregated (all Black) or a desegregated school (mixed)? Were you bused to school, and, if not, how were you transported to and from school? What was your experience of school – positive, negative, productive? Looking back and reflecting, how do you now rate the quality of education you received during your early, formative school years? In your view, how were you as a student? How were you viewed as a student by your teachers; by your parents; by other students? Who encouraged and supported you in school to excel, to push yourself and to do your best? What did you like best about school? What did you like least about school? Who were your playmates? Who did you not play with, even fought? What were the reasons for your fights? How did your parents feel about you fighting? What were “the rules of fighting” for your household? What role did religion play in your life at an early age? Did you attend church growing up? Who made sure you went to church? Who else went? What do you remember about church during this time period of your life? How stable, safe and secure was home for you? Did you ever move as a family during this period of your life? If so, why did you move and what do you remember about moving? What other significant events stand out for you during this period that have had an impact on your BEING? What do you remember about your *color* as a child and the *color* of others? Were you ever joked and teased about your *color*? Did your ever joke and tease others, especially at school, about their *color*? What is your fondest memory or experience from this time? What is your most painful memory from this time period? Who did you go to or who came to you to talk with you and console you when you were hurt and who did you go to for help and protection?

III. The Teenage Years (13-19)

What do you remember about turning thirteen (13), officially becoming a teenager? Was there a celebration marking this event for you? Did you celebrate birthdays and other events as a family? What were the family rituals that occurred daily, weekly, monthly, yearly? How participatory were you in these rituals and celebrations? Were they usually times of fun or chaos? Who were you closest to during this period in your life? Who did you look up to and admire and want to emulate? How was your relationship with your mother, father, and siblings during this period of your life? Who was the person in the family who seemed to make life unnecessarily difficult? Who was the person in the family who helped to make life fun? Who outside your immediate family did you spend most of your time with? When did you start dating? Who and what kind of person did you find yourself most attracted to and whom did you find were attracted to you? How would you describe yourself as a teenager – open, happy, angry, confused, rebellious, studious, inquisitive, etc.? How was your personality? What were you into as a teenager? What things did you do that you enjoyed and loved? What things did you have to do or were made to do that you didn’t enjoy or even like? Who made you do these things? How did you continue to do in school as you got older? Did school stimulate and challenge you or did you find it boring and uninteresting? What were your favorite subjects? When did you know what you wanted to do once you finished school? Did you graduate from high school?

Who helped you talk about and plan your next steps after high school? What did you do once you left/finished high school? How did the issue of race and the presence of racism influence this decision and action? How well do you think the education you received at school helped to prepare you to deal with the social realities of life, especially with the prevalence of racism in society? What did school teach you about African American heritage and culture? How about the education you received from home about the African American legacy and heritage? Did it help prepare you to confront racism beyond your home and immediate neighborhood or community environment? What do you remember about your awareness of being an African American? How did you feel about being an African American or Black person during this period of your life? How did you wear your hair as a teenager and what was your style of dress? Did your parents approve of the way you physically presented yourself? What comments and feedback did you receive from parents and others about your BEING as a teenager? How did others that you knew who were African Americans seem to feel about themselves and their color? What and how were the issues of color and race talked about, addressed and handled in your family? What were the *race stories* you heard at home and in the community? What message did your home environment give you about validating and affirming your BEING as an African American? What pictures, images and symbols were on your walls, mantles, and/or dressers at home? What did you watch on television? What books, magazines did you read at home? What did you hear, learn, know about Africa and how did you feel about Africa and its people? Where did your information about Africa come from – parents, teachers, books, T.V., etc.? And what about the education and teachings you received at church at this juncture in your life? Did you continue to attend church at this time and if you did, how did you find the teachings and messages helpful in the formation, centering and affirmation of your BEING? What images, symbols and messages were you receiving and seeing at school, on television, and other places about different racial groups as well as your own? How exposed or involved were you with other ethnic/racial groups at this point? How involved were other members of your family with other ethnic/racial groups? How involved were you (and your siblings) in the social, political and economic affairs and business of your family? What did you know about your family financial circumstances? Did your parents vote? Did they teach and encourage you to vote as well as give you reasons why voting is so important to African Americans? Where your parents what you would consider then or now activists? What stood out for you as the family values that were stressed either verbally and/or in action? What would you say was most important to your parents as evidenced by who/what they gave most of their time and attention to? What responsibilities did you have as a teenager? Did you work and, if so, was it by choice or out of necessity? How were you paid and how did you manage your money? What stands out most for you about being a teenager that you would say influenced your way of BEING then? What do you remember wanting as a teenager that you and/or your family didn't have? How did not having this particular thing impact you? Looking back and reflecting now, what would you say you learned most from your parents, other extended family members and adults about BEING in the world as an African American? How would you say they dealt with the hurts and pains of their own BEING as a result of the oppression, denied opportunities and injustices they experienced because of racism? How aware and sensitive would you

say you were at this time to the fact that your parents and other African Americans were having such experiences that directly affected their state and way of BEING because of racism? Did you have any experiences as a teenager that you would identify as racially motivated and charged? Where you ever involved with the police as a teenager and if so, for what? What were the outcomes of your involvement? What regrets do you have most about this period of your life? What are you most proud about during your teenage years?

IV. Young Adulthood (20-35)

As you moved into young adulthood, how equipped do you feel you were spiritually, mentally, and emotionally to deal with all that was going on politically, socially, and racially in life, and in your own life particularly? What immediately stands out most for you from this age period as it relates to your BEING in the world as an African American? How was/is life, the world, people different from how you expected when you were growing up? What do you wish you had been taught, told at home, school, and/or church to help you better internally process and deal with the realities of how society is inequitably structured and organized? What life philosophy had you developed at this point to help guide your life and your way of BEING to help you deal with racism and its residual impacts? When did you come to know and understand racism as a social and political phenomenon? What was the experience and whom did it involve? How did you respond to and handle this experience? How has the constant onslaught of racist actions and practices in society affected your capacity to care, to feel, to trust, to love? What type of feedback did/do you receive from your family and the larger society about who and how you were/are as a young adult? Who most influenced you at this point? What significant milestones did you accomplish during this time – college, employment, housing, marriage, children, etc.? What role did race and racism play in influencing your decision-making during this period, especially regarding marriage and children and where you chose to live? Did you ever consider not having children because of racism? What have you done to help equip and prepare your children to deal with racism? What impact has racism and its negative views and images portrayed of Blacks in the media and otherwise had on your sense of who you are and how you see/feel yourself to be, especially as a man or as a woman? When you watch movies that negatively portray Blacks, how do you identify with the characters and how does watching them make you feel? Do you identify with the characters and if not, why not? How politically conscious and involved would you say you were during this time? America, at least by the majority of its citizens, is considered to be both a Christian nation and a democracy despite the on-going presence and practices of racism, which, of course, is antithetical to both. How have you thought about these discrepancies and how do you manage to deal with them as it relates to your way of BEING? What have been your direct experiences with how *Christian* and *democratic* this country has been to you and others you know? What have been the implications of these views on your own choice of a religion and your political involvements and affiliation? Did you/do you vote? Have you ever encountered problems or challenges voting? Do you know anyone who has or did have difficulties voting? What family stories did you hear about your elders' efforts to vote? Did you ever have to speak out and stand up for

your human rights and/or the rights of someone else or others because of being unjustly treated and discriminated against? Where there times that you wanted to speak out, however, did not? What were those times and how did they leave you feeling? How attentive were you to your health and well-being during this time – diet, exercise, check-ups, etc.? How was the health of your parents, siblings, spouse, children, etc.? What was the most painful experience you had during this period of your life that involved racism/discrimination? Who knew about it? Were others involved? Who did you talk to? How did you process and deal with the incident – your thoughts, your feelings? What do you do to safeguard your mental, emotional and spiritual health, particularly to counter the sometimes silent, although very persistent impact of racism? How do you handle stress, frustration, anger, pain, grief?

V. Adulthood (36-50)

What primary life lessons would you say you have learned at this stage in your life that helps you organize and manage your BEING as an African American living in a racist society? Is racism an issue or concern for you at this stage? What impact, if any, is it having/did it have on your life during this phase? What is different about the way you carry and conduct yourself to deal with the knowing of racism from how you use to when you were younger? What racial myths and stories are you no longer plugged into that you use to believe and that influenced your thinking about and treatment of others, especially other African Americans? What do you do to validate and affirm your BEING? What, of what is considered African American culture, supports you *to be* – music, art, stories, folklore, etc.? What role is religion playing in your life to assist you in BEING as well? Is your circle of friends more diverse today than it use to be? Who do you allow to get intimate and close to you now? What concerns you most about the persistency of racism in society?

VI. Middle Age (50-65)

It was Shakespeare's character Hamlet who stated as early as the 17th century, "To be or not to be, that is the question." In looking at racism from this age vantage point, how would you say racism *could* contribute to one "not-being"? As a parent/grandparent, what concerns you most today about what your children and grandchildren have to face and contend with regarding racism? Since society is more desegregated –at least in appearance- what do you feel our children still need to know to help them manage BEING in a society that is, although less overtly racist, racist nonetheless? How do you psychologically and emotionally manage limiting the impact and effect racism has in your life at this juncture? In your view, can one who is a target of racism ignore racism and still be healthy, functional and whole? What would one have to give up of his or her *Self* in order to ignore, deny, reject and/or refute the presence and impact of racism in and on one's BEING? What, do you think, and perhaps even know, are/would be the repercussions and consequences of doing so? What sacrifices have you had to make about your BEING, your life as a consequence of racism? What have you accomplished in your life and established about your BEING despite the hounding presence and horrors of racism?

VII. Eldership (65+)

At this juncture in your life, how do you evaluate your way of BEING as an African American living in a racist society that has for centuries shown itself to be very un-Christian and non-democratic? In your view, what, if anything, is different about racism today from how it was when you were growing up and living in the world as a young adult? Is there a difference in how the image of Blacks is viewed, portrayed and treated? What are these differences and how is it impacting the African American community? African Americans have for a long time been considered a people who is *very religious* with Christianity being the religious choice of the majority. Since a primary and foundational tenet of Christian doctrine is that humanity, both male and female, has been created in the image and likeness of God, what then accounts for the extent of internalized inferiority that exists amongst African Americans, inclusive of those who are *very religious* and *Christian*? How does the reality of racism's presence in society affect you today? Do you still oppose it and, if so, how? What advice would you give to other African Americans, especially the younger generations, about how to BE as an African American in a racist society?

VIII. Specialized Topics of Focus

There are persons who are now coming forward and naming the traumatic experiences African Americans have had in this country as well as their lingering consequences. One such person is Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary who poses the questions: What do repeated traumas visited upon generation after generation of a people produce? What are the impacts of the ordeals associated with chattel slavery, and with the institutions that followed, on African Americans today? What effect has African American history had on African American culture and on the African American soul? Her answer: Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). Dr. Leary defines Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome as "a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today. Added to this is a belief (real or imagined) that the benefits of the society in which they live are not accessible to them." (*Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, Milwaukie, OR: Uptone Press, 2005, 125). Based on this definition as well as your own experiences and knowledge as an African American, what are your thoughts and feelings about Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome? What impact, if any, do you believe the long history of racism and oppression against African Americans has had on our psyches and how we see and feel about ourselves today?

How do you feel about and how do you explain the continued escalation of Black-on-Black crime in our communities?

How real do you believe racial profiling is and what psychological impact is it having on young Blacks today?

What do you think about the “N” word (nigger) and its seemingly very casual usage among young people to reference each other as well as by other ethnic groups to reference Blacks? Have you ever knowingly been called the “N” word or referred to someone else in this way? What were the circumstances and why?

The health of African Americans is extremely poor overall and has been for centuries. We lead in deaths related to heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, certain cancers, obesity, and others. We lack insurance coverage in large proportions and we often do not receive the best medical care even when we do go to the doctor. We have a high utilization of emergency rooms where the care is routine and usually without the needed follow-up required for treatment and cure. Today, as reported by Marian Wright Edelman of the Children’s Defense Fund in an article she authored in the National Urban League’s *The State of Black America 2006* entitled “The State of Our Children,” “Black babies are four times as likely as white babies to have their mothers die in childbirth” (133). What are your views about why we fail to take better care of ourselves? What role, if any, do you see racism playing in this debilitating health scenario for Blacks today, particularly given the past history that disbarred Blacks from being seen and treated for medical care even within public health systems that their taxes helped to fund?

Statistics show that there are more Black men in jail and prisons today than they are in college. In fact, according to the National Urban League’s *The State of Black America 2006*, “A black preschool boy born in 2001 has a one in three chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a black preschool girl has a one in 17 chance. Today, 580,000 black males are serving sentences in state or federal prison while fewer than 40,000 earn a bachelor’s degree each year... States spend more than triple per prisoner than what they spend per public school pupil... One in three black men between 20-29 years old is under correctional supervision or control. Girls represent the fastest- growing group of detained juveniles. Black youths are 48 times more likely to be incarcerated than white youths for comparable drug offenses. More black children and teens have been killed by firearms over the past six years than all the black people of all ages that we lost in the history of lynchings” (133-134). When you combine the large number of Blacks incarcerated with the number that are being murdered, do you believe we are facing a crisis regarding the Black male? Do you see the Black male becoming endangered given the rate of death and demise that is happening to him/them? How do you feel about what is happening to Black women as well, especially since they are the fastest growing incarceration and HIV/AIDS population in the country? What does and will all of this mean for the Black family and, most particularly, Black children?

Dr. Kenneth and Mamie Clark conducted a doll test over 50 years ago showing that young African American children preferred white dolls to black dolls and even identified themselves with the white dolls which they most often named as “good” rather than identifying with the black dolls which they most often considered “bad.” Their findings demonstrated the negative effects a racist and segregated school system (and society) had on Black children (and people). The Clark’s research results were instrumental in influencing the landmark Supreme Court decision that resulted

in school desegregation in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case, a case that simultaneously helped to catapult the prolific career of, then young NAACP lawyer, Thurgood Marshall (who would later serve on the U.S. Supreme Court as appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson). Then Chief Justice Earl Warren stated that the segregation of black school children “from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.” Recently, a young filmmaker, Kiri Davis of New York City, at age 16 in 2005, repeated a similar study and obtained basically the same results as the Clark’s despite Warren’s wisdom and truth. In her short documentary film entitled, *A Girl Like Me*, Ms. Davis sought to explore the standards of beauty being imposed on young Black girls with a particular interest in determining the effects these standards were having on their self-image and identity. A major section of the film featured the “doll test.” In a September 2007 *Ebony* article (“Is Black Still Beautiful?”), Ms. Davis commented about her results: “When I reconducted the same doll test over 50 years later with children as young as 4 and 5 years old, I unfortunately received similar results. Watching child after child select the White doll as the “good doll” and the Black doll as the “bad doll” was disheartening. The children in the doll test were like a mirror. They reflected exactly what they had been shown and exposed to. Due to the racism and prejudices that still permeate today’s culture, growing up Black in America can still make one feel less valued than our White counterparts” (233). What do you think and how do you feel about these same negative results repeating themselves over 50 years later despite the mammoth efforts of the Civil Rights movement, the NAACP and other like organizations to fight against racism and its image and self-esteem shattering effects? How do you account for the results today as it relates to what we, as adults are teaching and showing our children? What are the implications of these results on the BEING of young African Americans in particular and all African Americans in general?

Do you believe racism has diminished, is diminishing to the point that it is not significant enough to focus on or address today? What was your response to Don Imus’ comments a few months ago about the Rutgers women basketball players (nappy headed ho’s)? What response do you make to the comment former Secretary of Education William Bennett made in 2005 on his syndicated radio program that, “You could abort every Black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down”? What, ultimately, do you hear, feel, and know to be inherent in these statements as well as others categorically like them? What role do you see the media has in contributing to the on-going negative images portrayed of Blacks?

Given all that has been stated above as well as a multitude of other factors that attest to the pervasiveness of racism in our midst still, what difference did the Civil Rights movement make in changing the societal structure that nurtures and perpetuates racism? What more still needs to be done today?

What spiritual meaning do you make or give to the experience of *BEING* as an African American in a structurally racist society? How has the experience impacted your belief in God? your faith in God? your relationship with God? How do you view and see the role of religion in the lives of African Americans especially as a means of dealing with and coping with *BEING* within a structurally racist society?

APPENDIX E

POST-INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP PRESENTATION

Post-Interview Follow-up Presentation

First and foremost, thank you again and again for your willingness to participate in this research project entitled, "Resurrection of An Image." A few months ago, you completed the first of a three-part design whereby you allowed this researcher the privilege of an interview with you that asked you to go into great depth and detail to personally respond to the question: What is the experience of BEING as an African American in a structurally racist society? From this query, we took a chronological journey through your life as you recounted your story - your stories and experiences that included memories and sharings about your family's life even prior to your birth and from the point of your birth to what and how life is for you currently, again as an African American living in a social context where *race* has been assigned a value and is used to determine how its members lives are organized and structured and, most significantly, how the essence of their beings are either validated and affirmed or not validated and affirmed.

Just to refresh your memory, some of the questions and issues you responded to included:

Pre-Conception to Birth - What do you know about the life of your family prior to your conception and birth? How did your parents meet? What was life like for them before you were conceived and born? Where did they live? Who did they live near? Where did they work and what type of work did they do? What was their financial situation? Did they have other children prior to your birth? What do you know about the circumstances of your actual birth? Who was present? Where were you born – in a hospital, a clinic, at home? Who assisted with your delivery? As you reflected on this early beginning period of your life and the situation of your family, what stands out significantly for you as it relates to race and racism?

Birth to Age Twelve (0-12) - When and what do you first remember about yourself as a child? What was growing up in your household like? How were you made to feel as a child? Who made you feel special and loved? How did your parents "parent" you? What was the relationship like between your mother and father? Were they openly loving and affectionate with one another? What did you do as a family to have fun? When did you first know you were considered what is called today an African American or a Black person? What do you remember about racial issues and matters at this age as they affected you, your family, your neighborhood? What do you remember about first attending school? Did you attend a segregated (all Black) or a desegregated school (mixed)? Were you bused to school, and, if not, how were you transported to and from school? What was your experience of school? Who encouraged and supported you in school to excel, to push yourself and to do your best? What role did religion play in your life at an early age? Did you attend church growing up? How stable, safe and secure was home for you? Did you ever move as a family during this period of your life? What other significant events stand out for you during this period of your life that has had an impact on your BEING? What do you remember about your *color* as a child and the *color* of others? Were you ever joked and teased about your *color*? Did your ever joke and tease others, especially at school, about their *color*? What is your fondest memory or

experience from this time? What is your most painful memory from this time period? Who did you go to or who came to you to talk with you and console you when you were hurt and who did you go to for help and protection?

The Teenage Years (13-19) - What do you remember about turning 13, officially becoming a teenager? Did you celebrate birthdays and other events as a family? Who were you closest to during this period in your life? Who did you look up to and admire and want to emulate? How was your relationship with your mother, father, and siblings during this period of your life? How would you describe yourself as a teenager? How did you continue to do in school, as you got older? What did you do once you left/finished high school? How did the issue of race and the presence of racism influence this decision and action? How well do you think the education you received at school helped to prepare you to deal with the social realities of life? How did you feel about being an African American or Black person during this period of your life? What and how were the issues of color and race talked about, addressed and handled in your family? What were the *race stories* you heard at home and in the community? What message did your home environment give you about validating and affirming your BEING as an African American? What pictures, images and symbols were on your walls, mantles, and/or dressers at home? What did you watch on television? What books, magazines did you read at home? What did you hear, learn, know about Africa and how did you feel about Africa and its people? Where did your information about Africa come from? Did your parents vote? Did they teach and encourage you to vote as well as give you reasons why voting is so important to African Americans? What stood out for you as the family values that were stressed either verbally and/or in action? Looking back and reflecting now, what would you say you learned most from your parents, other extended family members and adults about BEING in the world as an African American? How would you say they dealt with the hurts and pains of their own BEING as a result of the oppression, denied opportunities and injustices they experienced because of racism? Did you have any experiences as a teenager that you would identify as racially motivated and charged?

Young Adulthood (20-35) - As you moved into young adulthood, how equipped do you feel you were spiritually, mentally, and emotionally to deal with all that was going on politically, socially, and racially in life and, in your own life particularly? When did you come to know and understand racism as a social and political phenomenon? How has the constant onslaught of racist actions and practices in society affected your capacity to care, to feel, to trust, to love? What role did race and racism play in influencing your decision-making during this period, especially regarding marriage and children and where you chose to live? Did you ever consider not having children because of racism? What have you done to help equip and prepare your children to deal with racism? What impact has racism and its negative views and images portrayed of Blacks in the media and otherwise had on your sense of who you are and how you see/feel yourself to be, especially as a man or as a woman? America, at least by the majority of its citizens, is considered to be both a Christian nation and a democracy despite the on-going presence and practices of racism, which, of course, is antithetical to both. How have you thought about these discrepancies and how do you manage to deal with them as it relates to your way of BEING? What have been the implications of these views on your own choice of a religion and your political involvements and affiliation? What family stories did you hear

about your elders' efforts to vote? Did you ever have to speak out and stand up for your human rights and/or the rights of someone else or others because of being unjustly treated and discriminated against? Where there times that you wanted to speak out, however, did not? What were those times and how did they leave you feeling? How was your health and the health of your parents, siblings, spouse, children, etc.? What was the most painful experience you had during this period of your life that involved racism/discrimination? Who knew about it? Who did you talk to? How did you process and deal with the incident – your thoughts, your feelings? What do you do to safeguard your mental, emotional and spiritual health, particularly to counter the sometimes silent, although very persistent impact of racism? How do you handle stress, frustration, anger, pain, grief?

Adulthood (36-50) - What primary life lessons would say you have learned at this stage in your life that help you organize and manage your BEING as an African American living in a racist society? What is different about the way you carry and conduct yourself to deal with the knowing of racism from how you use to when you were younger? What racial myths and stories are you no longer plugged into that you use to believe and that influenced your thinking about and treatment of others, especially other African Americans? What do you do to validate and affirm your BEING? What role is religion playing in your life to assist you in BEING as well? Is your circle of friends more diverse today than it use to be? Who do you allow to get intimate and close to you now? What concerns you most about the persistency of racism in society?

Middle Age (50-65) - As a parent/grandparent, what concerns you most today about what your children and grandchildren have to face and contend with regarding racism? Since society is more desegregated –at least in appearance- what do you feel our children still need to know to help them manage BEING in a society that is, although less overtly racist, racist nonetheless? What sacrifices have you had to make about your BEING, your life as a consequence of racism? What have you accomplished in your life and established about your BEING despite the hounding presence and horrors of racism?

Eldership (65+) - In your view, what, if anything, is different about racism today from how it was when you were growing up and living in the world as a young adult? Is there a difference in how the image of Blacks is viewed, portrayed and treated? How does the reality of racism's presence in society affect you today? Do you still oppose it and, if so, how? What advice would you give to other African Americans, especially the younger generations, about how to BE as an African American in a racist society?

Specialized Topics of Focus - (1) Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) as defined by Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary as “a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today. Added to this is a belief (real or imagined) that the benefits of the society in which they live are not accessible to them”; (2) The continued escalation of Black-on-Black crime in our communities; (3) Racial profiling (4) The “N” word or nigger and its seemingly very casual usage today amongst Blacks and by other ethnic groups in reference to us; (5) The health of African Americans – mind, body, spirit and soul; (6) Statistics showing that there are more Black men in jail and prisons today than they are in college; (7) The repeat of the *doll test* by young

filmmaker, Kiri Davis, in 2005 that yielded the same results of those first conducted over 50 years ago by Dr. Kenneth and Mamie Clark, showing that young African American children preferred white dolls to black dolls and even identified themselves with the white dolls which they most often named as “good” rather than identifying with the black dolls which they most often considered “bad”; (8) Don Imus’ comments a few months ago referencing/labeling the Rutgers women basketball players as “nappy headed ho’s”; (9) The comment former Secretary of Education William Bennett made in 2005 on his syndicated radio program that, “You could abort every Black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down”; and, (10) What difference did the Civil Rights movement make in changing the societal structure that nurtures and perpetuates racism? What more still needs to be done today? What spiritual meaning do you make or give to the experience of *BEING* as an African American in a structurally racist society? How has the experience impacted your belief in God; your faith in God; your relationship with God? How do you view and see the role of religion in the lives of African Americans especially as a means of dealing with and coping with *BEING* within a structurally racist society?

Now, today, we are beginning the second part of this three-part research design with the third part culminating on _____ as a one-day retreat that will have you and all other participants coming together for a final session or gathering.

Since we were last together for the interview, I have had the opportunity to listen to your stories and all the rich information you shared. And, I listened. I listened to what was said as well as what, perhaps, was not said as much has been silenced within you, within us. But I listened and I heard, I felt, I sensed, I intuited and I prayed. The result of this intense listening and praying has been a poem – your poem – that I would like to now share with you.

The poem is written and will be presented from the first person *I*. I do so because first, it is your poem and I want you to hear it as your poem and, secondly, I want your spirit to receive it in this way as well. Thus, as your poem is shared, please know that I am speaking to your spirit, the essence of who you, of who we are; that part of us, that part of you that knows, sees, hears, feels, receives and responds to and acts on Truth.

As you listen to and receive *your poem*, I ask you to:

- (1) Get comfortable, as comfortable as you will allow yourself to and position your body, feet, hands, arms in the position you need to in order to feel, in order to be relaxed and receiving.
- (2) Let yourself become conscious of the incoming and outgoing of your breath as you breathe deeply and evenly so that you are supported by your breathing to relax and to be comfortable.
- (3) Let yourself close your eyes in this relaxed state, grateful for the opportunity, the time, the space, the place to *just be*.
- (4) Now that you are relaxed and your eyes are closed, just allow yourself to be fully, completely open, noting what you experience as your Spirit hears and receives your poem.

- (5) And lastly, after the poem is shared and you have heard and received it, just remain with your eyes closed for a while as you listen to and feel your Spirit's response and you let yourself fully experience what comes up for you.

(Gently, lovingly and affirmatively read the poem and after waiting for a brief pause, allow participant to render his/her response, beginning with the following lead in questions:)

What are you feeling now that you have heard and received your poem?

Did your poem speak to your Spirit, and, if so, how?

Spirit Assignment: For the next seven (7) days, as part of this second phase of the research design, I ask that you read your poem at least twice: once in the morning before getting busily engaged in your day and a second time at night, just prior to retiring or going to bed. Also, read your poem to yourself in front of a mirror. You may read your poem to your *self* as many times during the day as you desire, even without being in front of a mirror, but at least twice in front of a mirror. Again, the main thing is to read and receive your poem and allow it to continue speaking to your Spirit.

At some point during the day and before going to bed, write the reflections/thoughts/feelings/desires you experience as a result of reading and receiving *your poem* (best, of course, immediately after reading it), in the Reflections Journal being provided. Write whatever comes up for you after your reading. From day-to-day during the course of the next seven days, you may have thoughts, feelings and/or actual experiences that you want to write about. You might even be inspired to write a poem, a short story, a narrative of some type – or even to draw. The main thing is to let your poem keep speaking to you as you reflect on your life experiences as an African American who has been living and seeking *to be* in a structurally racist society.

Note: Have participant(s) complete **MY FAVORITES** form.

Again, thank you so much for your invaluable participation.

APPENDIX F
A JOURNAL OF REFLECTIONS

A Journal of Reflections

Initial: _____

Date: _____

Reflections Journal

**My reflections/thoughts/feelings/desires after reading my poem, _____
are:**

APPENDIX G
MY FAVORITES FORM

MY FAVORITES**Initial:** _____**Date:** _____**Please complete the following about yourself:****1. Three (3) of my favorite foods are:**

(1)

(2)

(3)

2. Three (3) of my favorite colors are:

(1)

(2)

(3)

3. Three (3) of my favorite songs are:

(1)

(2)

(3)

4. Three (3) of my favorite scriptures/quotes/sayings are:

(1)

(2)

(3)

APPENDIX H

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS TO AND ABOUT THEIR POEMS

Feedback from Participants To and About Their Poems

The feedback the researcher received from the participants about the poems the researcher wrote especially for and about them as part of the ministry project, “Resurrection of An Image,” is structured as follows: (1) Initial – the response immediately after the poem was first read and shared with each participant by the researcher; and, (2) Journal Reflections – feedback they wrote in the journals provided to them by the researcher as they were given the Spirit Assignment of reading their poems twice a day, for seven days. Not all participants did seven days. All feedback provided germane to the assignment has been included.

Participant #1 – RN - “A Soul Searcher Who Loves”

Initial

- I immediately think of three things: (1) A preamble to my birth; (2) A capture of my life; and, (3) It could be my obituary.
- It makes me grateful to have lived; to be alive; grateful to have a soul. I can’t imagine not being.
- It spoke to my spirit.
- It reminds me of my need to keep unplugging from the precepts and dictates of racism on my life.
- I am working on not proving myself and instead, just being myself. The [initial] interview highlighted for me just how much I was internalizing the negativity of racism. A question that stood out for me was when you [the researcher] asked, “Whom did you tell? Who knew what you experienced and what you went through?” I realized so much of it – the anger, the frustration, the pain, the grief – I never talked about it. So now, I am consciously not internalizing it.
- When we first moved here [in a majority white, upper middle income, affluent neighborhood], I wanted to prove that I was worthy to be in the neighborhood [as a Black person, a Black family]. I went around speaking, talking, visiting, helping, showing, demonstrating my skills which most have been amazed at. I realize now, and this experience has helped me to do so, that I don’t have to *prove myself*; rather I just need *to be*.
- How did you [the researcher] know all that, get all of that in there about me? Wow!

Journal Reflections

- Reflections: Wow! I can’t be all that. In spite of the daily barrage of seeing racism played out in/on the media, the constant external negative feelings projected at me by my surroundings, the news and printed page spilling out systemic racism, my own past experiences popping up from

time to time causing me to pause and get a grip or else fall back into despair. I must have something that keeps me going, wanting, desiring, working, seeking and hoping. It, my *being*, as captured in this poem so elegantly written and given to me in the name of LOVE undoubtedly says I am perhaps some or all that.

- Thoughts: Although, the poem paints a near perfect picture of one RN, it invokes a desire now to live better, be more forgiving, less critical of others, continue to look for the good in others and share, when I can, my great fortune.
- Desire: Maximize new inner peace prompted by these words so arranged to cause me to take stock/inventory of my past arming me with weapons I didn't realize I possess to help me deal with my own *ontological grief*.
- Reflections: Peaceful: Encouraged: Thankful: Outraged: Determined.
- Thoughts: It's difficult to take in all that has been said yet I relish the essences of what has been said here in this written portrait of me. Now that my trials and tribulations are chronicled here in a poetic fashion, I feel reinvigorated to continue life's journey with renewed focus and purpose.
- After reading my poem today I thought about the impact it has had on me during my day. I went shopping, got gas and waited in line for a while to get my car inspected and emission checked. During each of these activities I encountered some form of racism, bigotry and ill will toward me as I tried to just be a normal person wanting to get his business done. In each instance I thought about my poem and how it described me. I didn't get angry as I normally do when these things happen. I just smiled within and thought about how strong I am to get over these ...treatments I have suffered. Now, I have a new way of dealing with these poor souls who have nothing else better than to be evil or negative toward their fellow man. I sigh a breath of relief – Ashe! Ashe! Ashe! Ashe!
- I got up early this morning to take my car to the inspection station. What a glorious morning to see the sun come up. My poem has a different meaning to me as different events occur during the waking hour. After getting my car done, I met my youngest son back at the house where we spent a wonderful day moving stuff, painting and installing a modern, state-of-the-art closet organization system. What a wonderful day! As we worked together, I thought how blessed I [am] to be able to have a great son and communicate at a level so dear to me. Although I can't alter my past, I can certainly do everything in my power to make the most of the present and plan a great future. Thank God for being! Me!
- Inspired, Blessed, Motivated.
- This is becoming my daily devotion period. I look forward to reading my poem: I feel good. Ready to take on the world with a renewed strength. Knowing now I can't be stopped, I want to do more for the good of mankind. I wonder why this good fortune has been given to me – that is meeting [the researcher]. Halleluiah, Sweet Jesus!

- Today after reading my poem I thought back upon my biological father whom I never met. Because he and my Mother departed before I knew him or had any dealings with him. Although most experts on behavior and human development would have you believe we are solely formed by our environment, my poem, which I feel captures my development, certainly rebukes that notion. In order for me to become the person I am there has to be more than environment shaping me. The drive I personally feel even today had to have come from another source. My Mother was a tremendous influence on me to a certain extent. But the cognitive part of me had to have come from another source not to say my Mother didn't provide some of it. The little tidbits I have gleaned from many sources about my absentee Father fits in with my poem. I think he was caught up in an environment, where he wanted to be more, rejected him totally. Without a support system in place to help him through the fray of life at that time he may have become a person described in my poem or maybe he did. I have no way of knowing.
- As a little boy I was always concerned with acquisition of knowledge somehow believing it would lead to the life I wanted to live. Not knowing that reasoning, intuition or perception w[as] the key to acquiring knowledge. Now I wonder where did I get those prerequisites allowing me to [achieve the] accomplishments described in my poem. I firmly believe some of my absentee Father's traits are the source of my drive, stamina and determination. My reading today brings out my inner desire to always do the best. Not the best *I can do* but the best. Which causes me to continually search for what is the best?
- Inspired again! This is the last day to provide comment on my poem via the media Tenacious [researcher] has provided. I will not stop, however, I will continue to read my poem every day to start my day from now on until I memorize the poem so I can recite it to myself as I shower or shave in the mornings.
- *Being* has never occurred to me as it has now. My goodness, what powerful beings we could be, if only we could love and help each other.
- What is the future of racism? Why has it been allowed to flourish so long? Where is the natural law to stop this insane act perpetrated on people? How does it affect those who are subject to this barbaric act? When will it cease to be? Can you imagine the amount of intellectual loss the world has suffered because of racism? Unable to answer any of the above questions I hope and pray [the researcher's] work on uncovering and healing ontological grief will contribute a tremendous amount of insight, if not answers, to these questions. I thank [the researcher] from the bottom of my heart for this incalculable amount of work she has put forth in this endeavor.

Participant #2 – JN - “The Love that Love Grew”

Initial

(Crying silent tears during and after hearing and receiving her poem)

- I'm astounded at how you [the researcher] captured the experience of my life, especially how sheltered and protected I've been.
- I realize how blessed I am.
- I have had the tendency to take other people's issues and make them my own. If something happened between us that was controversial or challenging, I would look at myself to see what it was about me that caused it or saw myself as the one with the problem. Or, around whites I was always trying to prove or show them I was just as good as or better. I realize now, as a result of the [initial interview], I don't have to do this. I just need to be who and how I am. I still do it sometimes, but I'm now more aware of it and I'm working on it.
- Thank you [researcher]. Thank you [researcher] very much.

Journal Reflections

- My reflections and thoughts are of my father and how trapped he must have felt. Working in a coal mine seems such a miserable existence for such a sensitive, smart, and loving man. I've shed a lot of tears with these thoughts.
- Today I remembered something I did that must have really hurt my Auntie. Some friends and I had come to her house for lunch. My elementary school was close enough for that. As we were leaving she started to hug and kiss me, as we always did when parting, and I didn't allow it. I didn't want to be called "Auntie's bay" (teased) all the way back to school. I still remember her look, but I can't remember if we ever discussed it. Maybe that's one reason I've always hugged and kissed my sons and instilled in them that it's all right to show affection. My friends have said they liked the fact that my boys never got to old for them to hug.
- Today is indeed a beautiful day that God has sent. I'm feeling that prediction of unusual warmth as another example of God's warm embrace which enables me to extend [and] continue my loving, in spite of racism sometimes. I've been given so much love; therefore I have so much to give.
- Love surrounds me. I'm experiencing so much more calmness; not allowing others' mess [to] upset my space, not claiming their negativity.
- I didn't think my mother loved me when I was a small child. She didn't hug and cuddle me as my Auntie did. Because of that I remained distant to her into my adulthood. Then I began to realize her love had been there all the time, but in a different form. She showed it in the things she'd do for me: my lovely clothes, always immaculate; my great lunches for school; taking my friends and me to movies and games, etc. That's how she showed her affection and caring. She had never received that cuddly kind of love, so it just wasn't in her make-up. I can be thankful that I was able to show her I did love her later in life.
- Tonight I just feel relaxed & at peace, so very thankful!
- I still wonder about my tears. Why do I cry so easily? Why?

- Tonight I feel very light, remembering some very special times with my mother and sisters when they were ...in college. I really treasure those times. It was before her spiral into bad health.
- The light feeling has carried over to this morning. I am so very thankful that my Auntie was there for me. She really brought a balance to my life. Sometimes I shudder to think of what it might have been like without her. God really blessed me with an angel in her.
- I've always tried to see the best in someone. I was once told I was too naïve. I had to be practically slapped to know I'd been insulted. I think I had to learn that everyone didn't love me like my Auntie. I still look for the best, but with more caution. Life's experiences have taught me that.
- I'm feeling so very full and blessed this morning. Our sons are coming with us to South Africa. Love abounds. They really want to share this experience with us.
- Being loved has molded me into who I am. I love. I feel it; I express it. I hurt in it. I laugh and rejoice in it. I cry through all of it. I continue to wonder why so many tears.
- My thoughts keep returning to my father. He loved me. I know that. I fear that he never really knew how much I appreciated the sacrifices he made for me. How I loved him, though I only really came to understand his and angry and hurtful times in my adulthood.
- I grew up surrounded by three different loves from the three most important people of my youth: My mother with her delicious meals, great housekeeping, beautifully ironed pretty clothes, etc. as her way of showing love. (Not seen as that by a child, me). My father in providing a good living for his family, though a very unhappy and frustrated intelligent man. (My not understanding what it was taking out of him, spiritually, as a man.) My aunt in always showing how much she cared in the caressing, holding, cuddling, self-esteem building, etc. I'm a product of all of these loves. My love, I feel, encompasses all of these. I am all of this.

Participant # 3 – LW - "Awakened to Love"

Initial

- Very good, a very good narration of my life.
- I did go back to State Park. I had, not so much images, but an awakening of those feelings...the murder of my father.
- My grandmother and my mother, I can't separate them....
- I had a feeling of awareness.... It kindled feelings, called attention to memories, like listening to a song that was produced some time ago.
- It registered some other thoughts and feelings.... I would call it a description.

- The poem certainly helps you to understand social structures and relationships. Racism is a term, a concept that tries to call attention to other humans in some kind of relationship that is trying to maintain control, domination.
- The poem calls attention to pathways were people of color have dealt with domination and resisted it, finding ways to approach it, undermine it.
- It talks about us as an emerging force and about us recognizing the weakness of the structure.
- What I have come to see is that there has been/is a reaction to this racial structure. It entails not only emotional dislike, but at the same time, I recognize for me, it was a reaction to the image they hurled against me. The emotional dislike was due to the images they, the system, the structure of white domination, hurled at us, at me. The social structure was like a giant, a Pharaoh to use biblical language. It is what Frantz Fanon talks about in *Black Skins, White Masks*. I had the conflict which most people like me have.
- The poem helped me to reflect more on this process – the maintenance of racism as a structure. It exposes, gives a lot of credence to double consciousness in that you can't serve two masters.
- The racial tension has served as a force akin to that necessary to bring forth a diamond and a pearl.
- In this racial structure, the way I see it, there are two basic responses: (1) the response to images; or (2) a creative response. The creative response is what helps us to fight against it and even free ourselves from the domination. The response to the images keeps us bound and being controlled and dominated.
- We are created for social relationship, for communication and connection one with another. We do not and cannot exist alone, nor can we alone validate and affirm our being or existence.

Journal Reflections

- I remembered my mother; more specifically I recalled one of the many days we spent fishing the backwaters of Kershaw County, South Carolina. On this particular day, we were not on a river but leaving the water returning home. On this day I had taken mother and her friend (another female her age) with us. We were in my car when two police troopers stopped us at a roadblock. I was told to show my identification and registration. Apparently I was not removing the documents from my wallet quickly enough. The trooper demanded that I give them to him more quickly. I informed him that he "wait a minute." My mother was in the front seat of the car with me. She saw the whole thing. The young trooper said, "Get out the car." When I got out the car, my mother apparently got out the car too. The trooper began to tell me I was disobeying an officer and he was going to arrest me and began to reach for [my] hands to cuff them. My mother grabbed the trooper and demanded that he leave me alone. I had noted

that the other trooper had drawn his pistol. I told the trooper to leave my mother alone and I would go with them after I spoke with my mother and her friend. These thoughts came and my feelings were awakened for Mother and her love for me and my brothers and sisters after reading the poem.

- Reflections: Connections and continuity in development: relationship between my thinking and response and the care-taking environment (grandmother, mother, father and others).
- Thoughts: Nature of the human being: my being is like clay; it is shaped by me as I adapt and adjust to other human beings in relationships.
- Feelings: Something that bonds: love begets love.
- Desires: Something seeking to know: I see myself and myself is the authority and is creating me. Human nature is the clay. I am clay over clay. Praises are due to the Clay Maker.
- Reflections: It seems the birthing or delivery process need a “push (more) and pull (less)” assistance or midwife in human transcendence. It also appears from reading “Awakened to Love” that the “insulated community” is like the uterus of the female.
- Thoughts: Push and pull come from the insulated community and racism. The awakening came from my adapting and adjusting to the push and pull impact (effect).
- Feelings: I feel there is always an “Awakening to Love,” more or less. Without the (more) of an insulated community and the grief of racism (less), I would not know love. I sense the less one has the more one will have if transcendence takes place.
- Desires: I desire to know more about what love is.
- Reflections: It seems I have lived (in) and transcended worlds with the power of love. Love helps me to open natural caves of understanding (new worlds). In some way it helps me to face the inevitable pain and doubt, the inevitable misunderstanding and lonely moments.
- Thoughts: We must leave worlds to discover new worlds. How we leave and what we discover seems link[ed] to our knowledge of love.
- Feelings: I sense when I read “Awakened to Love,” I was not very conscious of what I was doing in the earlier years. I was just doing.
- Reflections: In the beginning and in the end there seems to be love.
- What is it that can be learned from this life narration (Poem) that can be used to construct a therapeutic model to help transcend the existing socialization process, which causes grief in black and white people in America? I am assuming that no

real change will make sense unless it is accompanied by a radical alteration in nature of feelings, responses, and most particular in the use and purposes of the socialization process.

- The Poem reveals that the organization of the care-taking environment is critical to understanding what therapy is needed in the socializing process. It seems from this poem that I was in an environment insulated from the direct hits of the “white mind” that was “raging and looming all around.” While there were damage and grief, there was sufficient nurturing (love) to help facilitate transcendence. From reading this poem, I sense that the care-takers as well as the white racist are responsible for helping to create the tension in me to transcend and receive my human heritage.

Participant #4 – AC - “A Queen is Born”

Initial

- You [the researcher] just told my whole life. Wow!
- As you were telling it, I was visually seeing it, all of the incidents you mentioned. I could see myself being back there experiencing it. It’s a lot and it has made me who I am today.
- I’m an observer, still today. I watch from a distance and analyze and make decisions. I make a selection of who I want to talk to. I watch what you do more than what you say.
- Wow! – to have someone see something about me that most don’t see or understand. We live in a society that doesn’t take the time to see or know one another. People need to treat people differently.

Journal Reflections

- I thought of racism, not of the color of my skin, but racism about the disability that I have endure[d].
- I don’t necessarily believe it was all about racism but it [was] about my personality. I realized that I was not aggressive but I know that each time [some]thing happen[ed] to me, I would not react negatively but try to go home and analyze all that ha[d] taken place.
- Today I thought of how racism affects me and how I relay racism to my natural children. Because of my experiences I want my children to not have to find themselves in situation[s] that belittle them. I also had discussions with the children and each has come up with their own idea of racism. They were always in mixed classes. My middle child had her first experience with racism in kindergarten. A young white girl told her that her skin was dirty because she was black.

- Tonight I thought of the concept “I am special.” I have heard many people tell me I’m special but there are a few people who did not treat me as if I am special. They did the opposite. So I question why people call me special and others treat me as if I am the enemy or a person who is a problem for them.
- Mistaken identity – it has always amazed me how we are viewed as black people. So many men and women went to jail because of mistaken identity. So many people were killed because of mistaken identity. I came from New York with my own style of wearing clothes. I went to several stores and they accused me of stealing just because of how I wore my clothes. All I wanted to do was to buy a product and leave - only because of the color of my skin, which was covered in my own style.

Participant # 5 – MC - “Fitted for Love”

Initial

- Beautiful!
- It brought me back to how things were back then and how I could not rest; always living in fear of lynchings, beatings. I had many restless nights because I could never be at peace. I was living in the fear of the unknown.
- This [the research experience, the interview, the poem] is helping me to realize that the more I get out, the better I feel. There is more of a release knowing that I’m able to share rather than keep it all inside of me.
- I never really discussed it with anyone until we started doing this [the research process that started with an individual interview that asked the question: What has been your experience of being as an African American living in a structurally racist society?] I didn’t talk with my parents about it.

Journal Reflections

- First of all I thank God for the opportunity to share my story. Furthermore, I thank [the researcher] for allowing me to be a part of her research for her dissertation.
- As I reflect on “Fitted for Love”, [the researcher] says I am Love. Moreover, as I reflect over “Fitted for Love”, i.e., my story, I was elated that I could share and really express who I am. Someone has given me the opportunity to release my “gut” feelings. My “gut” feelings that I’m not ashamed of.
- I believe that since my father could not read or write that Martha was pre-ordained to be my name. It’s amazing that he had no idea that he was pointing at the word “Martha.” It makes me feel divine and special. Ironically, after all was said and done of the 14 siblings that lived of the 24 that were born, I am the 7th daughter and the youngest. That within itself is a miracle.

- Although my father is deceased, ... the thought will never leave my mind how degraded he must have felt to be made to be less than a man in his family's eyes; to be such a good man [but] because of racism he could not properly provide for his family.
- By reflecting and meditating on my poem, thoughts enter my mind and the questions come, "How many people shared the same feeling as me? Did my siblings share the same feelings? How many people encountered the pain of growing up in the South and ask the "Why" questions? Moreover, "What thoughts and what suffering did my mother encounter as being the mother of our family and having to deal with how to rear her kids in such a devastating environment?" But thank God that from generation to generation, love went down through the generations not to hate because of the color of someone's skin. My heart still aches for them because I never knew if there was any happiness in their lives before death.
- I thought about me and tears came to my eyes thinking about them and my older siblings. How many restless nights they encountered. I will never know or feel the pains my parents felt, especially for [my father,] a man [who w]as head of our household.
- While reflecting over my life and as certain incidents ponder in my mind, "special" arrested my soul. Of course the realization is I know I am not the only Martha, however, I believe the "special" came directly from God. Many people have crossed my path and I believe something positive was deposited. This is what I believe is the "special" because I will listen and make time for anyone. In my heart I can accept anyone as a result of what [I] was taught growing up in the south (love all humankind and forget the butts). I do not believe anything in my life was accidental or coincidental, but God's will for me, even as a child.
- As a child, I always wonder[ed] what life would bring as my family moved around from place to place. My parents and siblings, more or less, sheltered me and no exposure to life had been experienced. Many things that occurred in my marriage probably can be attributed to my childhood rearing. For some unknown reasons, somehow I believed that finally, at last some of the pain and suffering would cease [through] the marriage I thought was my deliverance that had come from God. Not so, it was [the] beginning of a different type of pain that was a continuation of my childhood. Mental abuse is abuse regardless of the myriad of types.
- In my poem "Fitted for Love", my story is, love will conquer all. In spite of the exposure I experienced from racism during my life beginning with childhood and currently; the positive has precedence over the negative. I am still "Fitted for Love" because I believe I am "love."
- I will conclude with this: My childhood was not a life of crystal stairs because of the many nights there was never a balanced meal (except when there were visitors and holidays); decent living facilities; and no funds. My mother made all my clothes, even the under garments.

- I will never forget Sundays (my special day). Those were the days when there were teacakes (as I referred to them but known as sugar cookies), baseball games, laughter and fun. We took what we had to make the proper gears i.e., a big stick for a bat, rocks for bases, etc.
- What is so amazing to me is that the effects that result from the racism did not leave me bitter, maybe it was not meant to like some others. Consequently and furthermore, I have many scars in my heart, but no hatred.
- There were some happy days after my father moved to the city limits but again there was never any sufficient home, food, clothes, [or] funds to support our family. I can see now as I reflect back my parents were humble, loving hard working people who taught what they knew best, "Love" in spite of. However, as I listen to my siblings, they do not feel as I do.
- I know how I got over the improper clothes for school, some of the illiteracy because my parents were not educated to teach me. I think of my mother's awesome relationship with God and the memories she shared of Him. I thank God daily for the affect it had on my life. This is why I believe "Fitted for Love" is me.
- It is unfortunate that most people are bitter that grew up in South but I am not. People think that I am crazy when I tell them where I grew up and find it hard to believe that I do not hate because of the exposure to racism, but it is the truth. Additionally, like others I do not have the answers to the "why" and I refuse to allow the "why" to interfere with my relationship with God and others. If I do a reality check based on the horrible stories my siblings have shared maybe I should but that is not me. I do not have hatred in my heart, but I dislike some people's ways.

Participant # 6 – LB - "I AM LOVE!"

Initial

- The poem for me, to hear those life changing moments summed up like that was just, Wow! All I could think about was freedom, just being free. Just all that struggle with the internal and external, but all the time I'm really free to be, to be love. Not just to experience it, but to be it.
- Pretty profound to capture my life in that way. I am thankful – such insight. You [researcher] summed up the essence of my life just so profoundly. It's something that could be read at my funeral.
- You highlighted the significance of my life experiences. It kind of took me by surprise. You don't hear your life given back to you in this kind of way.
- You really captured my parents, especially the time they spent away doing what they had to do within a racist system to help us "make it." I'm overwhelmed that you were able to capture all of that and give it back to me in that way.

- A lot of times we think our parents don't love us enough or hear us.
- (Begins to cry) I'm in touch with the emotions, the feelings; that in the midst of all of that that we went through, that I went through, that I am worthy, that I have value. I could hear the value of life in my story. [Researcher] you really have a gift for listening.
- You realize how much you miss them [parents]. I haven't thought about missing my Mom in years. And if you aren't able to give the love to yourself, you do miss getting it from those who you knew loved you, like my mother. We hope and pray others see the love too.
- Love is not really a hassle; it really isn't. You [researcher] caught me off guard with that one [the poem].
- The most important thing for me is the faith and trust that you have can help you overcome it [racism]. You have the opportunity everyday to make it not be who you really are. I don't have to keep dragging it on.
- There is so much judgment there – about God being there to allow the exchange or allow the continuation of that experience, that pain.
- I am so much more than that. That [the poem] was awesome. From the first word out of your [the researcher's] mouth, it just resonated. My parents did all they could to protect me and to keep things in place. I got it. Thank you. Hearing it has given me the courage, the motivation to change my diet and exercise because my body is valuable.
- At this moment, the energy is intense, real clear, powerful.... the Love.

Journal Reflections

- I read my poem about 7:50 a.m. I was very emotional about it. I was struck by the idea that I don't wake [up] everyday think[ing] I am going to be met with racism, but inside me I have prepared myself that I will come face-to-face with that energy that is systemically in place.
- Today when I read my poem I was in a rush. I did not get time to reflect but I was aware of some of the words throughout the day.
- Today I was able to read it in the morning and at night and I slept well. Usually I wake up during the night.
- Today I found the phrase, "I was valuable from the moment I was born" believable – today.
- Did not get a chance to read today!!
- Today when I read my poem I was thinking of my behavior or choices that I have made came from conscious or unconscious thoughts of racism.

Participant #7 – MK – “A New Afrikan Warrior Queen Mother”

Initial

(Crying during and after receipt of the poem)

- I wasn't expecting that.
- I respond first to your [the researcher's] ability to listen and to capture the essence of the story.
- And I think you observed it [participant's response with tears; very emotional, moving].
- It reminded me of my great grandmother...the challenges, even now with Obama, the testing. I compare her so much to my son
- It's so touching. I try not to break down.
- The reaction to the realities of racism.... People tend not to understand why people, young people today are killing each other. It's self-hate [i.e., ontological grief]. No matter how much we pray and what we do, it seems the white man has everything.
- We have to find a way to know the image of God [i.e., Resurrection of an Image], then we will stop killing each other. They will pull their pants up and stop emulating the prison culture to where they're being directed.
- It was so touching that I broke down.... the poem's ability to help me go to the past and feel the pain. All of this comes from the evils of racism and white supremacy, white domination. The effects of racism have been and still are today devastating.
- As far as the future goes, I just hope more people will become involved in seeing God, knowing they are worthy; knowing that they can have their/our own leaders.
- We don't see the God in us enough to know who we are. We are so caught up in material things – cars, homes, money. We need to change our focus and our values.

Journal Reflections

- After reading my poem, I cried a bucket of tears and left for the Archives.
- “Resurrection of Grammy's image” and how much she loved me Granny's dignity in her erect carriage/posture (proud walk), in her starched apron and perfectly starched & ironed BONNET adorning her mixed gray hair (natural)

against her smooth reddish, brown skin (from Aunt Belle's Indian heritage) - and how she KNEW how FINE she was Who and Whose she was....

- (P.M.) - I wanted to feel her strong hugs again!
- As I rush to go to the memorial service of another Queen Mother (Hon. Hilda Mason), I reflect with confusion on How she could willingly marry a descendant of the Mayflower less than two generations from her ancestors' trip to the Americas on a slave ship! Thoughts and sadness surround Granny's marriage AND Hilda's last marriage.... This confusion is also connected to the full day commemoration of the 200th Anniversary of the Slave Trade Act of 1808 at the National Archives (entitled, "Abolition on the Road to Freedom.") I rubbed shoulders with many scholars from all over More committed than ever to "live the life I sing about" and you [the researcher] write about! Compelled to take action.
- "Here Am I Lord, Send Me!" was the obituary title (4 single-spaced pages long). Does that not qualify her for my poem's title? Does not her obituary title jell with my poem's lines "...not been enough to stop me from standing up for a just war when God asks the question, 'Whom shall I send?' For I am ever ready and willing to speak out, even from the wheelchair I now, as a consequence, sit in."
- What "twoness" caused the funeral program to show Hilda with a big BUSH but her DC Memorial Service program (for government officials, et al) to omit this beautiful photograph? What ambivalence causes both of us to be both "bougie" and militant (though on opposite ends of the economic spectrum? [T]hough I am for separation and Hilda is/was for integration) God used/is using us BOTH.... The many politicians made me think of Carolyn [participant's sister]!
- The at least [eleven] 11 minutes spent reading my poem this morning crystallized yesterday afternoon's "Literary Tribute to Dr. MLK, Jr." This was the 12th Annual Poetry "Extravaganza" by Collective Voices (CAAPA, Inc.) dealing with Reconciliation, Transformation and Social Justice.... I got dizzy and short of breath!
- I reflect on my incarceration in Fairfax County Jail for "just doing my job." How many people could have been/were caught up in the criminal justice system for such a frame as my accusation of "driving a stolen car"? There BUT for the GRACE of GOD....
- The beauty of MY Poem looms in my spirit – even though I still focus on my treatment in Virginia before I "escaped" to Maine & New Hampshire.
- Sparked by Bob Johnson's Clinton intro, willingness intensified to continue fighting "Uncle Tomism"! Why must the black billionaire acquiesce?
- Returning from MLK Library on this Dr. King's actual birthday; filled with inspiration from the Jubilee Choir of All Soul's Church. I agonize at the plight

of the Black Man (especially my son who was injured en route to see me this morning and still praised God for His mercy...) Was his hospital treatment (or the lack thereof) based on his color?

- I wanted to skip the stanza/section about the cars... I wonder what my life & my mother's life would have been without COINTELPRO. Her (mother's) payment from the Chicago COINTELPRO lawsuit was really minimal. But she/they won! (Proof of years of bugging/following/harassment/etc.) I question the depth of such introspection for it can be dangerous, especially when alone.
- Tonight [the researcher] ... told me Saturday's retreat will be in SILENCE from 10a-4p!! Guess I'll reflect on being/BEING "A New Afrikan Warrior Queen Mother!"
- This morning's entry will end this project because the white developers have decided to cut off the heat in both MVT buildings (and offered to supply me with a safe space heater)... Is there such a thing for a w/c [wheelchair] user off & on for more than 30 years?
- The "theologically incorrect and spiritually wrong" PLACE in which I again find myself leads me to another favorite scripture (Romans 12: 1-2, KJV): "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."
- ...And to a hotel-change of environment! Too bad I can't go to Switzerland, Japan or Saudi Arabia again! May ALL my play children join in the fight as New Afrikan Warriors until we are Free! Free! Free of racist oppression.

Participant #8 – TF – "A Spirit Dancer Who Loves"

Initial

- (Crying) God is just awesome! As I listened, that would be nice to read as a eulogy piece at my funeral. When I focus on the goodness of God, I know He has done miraculous things in my life. Yes, I may be without a lot, but I am so blessed.
- I am thankful for the connection [with the researcher].
- T___ is a Russian name that means "love" and F___ means "castle." I have love in my castle, which is my heart.
- I would never have made it without my relationship with the Lord.
- I thank you [researcher] for studying me, for researching me. I'm thankful for being a part of this connection.

- Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Christ and it has been Christ who has gotten me through racism and sexism.
- That's [the poem] incredible. Sometimes we don't even realize it's right here. I said to myself, "Wow! I would love to get to know her" [the person she was revealed and affirmed *to be* in her poem].
- It touched inside, internally. It tells me that I am rising, that the future is still bright for me. I'm different. I'm unique, the gifts, the skills I have can only be fulfilled by me.
- Hearing this poem, my poem, I need to be more confident. That went straight to my heart. Wow, that was touching!

Journal Reflections

- After reading about me, tears streamed down my face. It is as if I had pressed rewind on the remote control button on my life. Two words from the poem "A Spirit Dancer Who Loves" stuck in my mind: 'circumstances or conditions.' My life as it appears to be always challenging and filled with circumstances or conditions. Nothing has ever been easy for me. What has sustained me is the presence and the spirit of the indwelling Holy Spirit. I am nothing without God.
- Reading this poem has opened my eyes and heart. Again, racism lifts its ugly head. If God has given me the strength to endure in the past, then surely history will be for [me again] for the challenges, oppositions, circumstances and conditions.
- My poem has shed light on some skills I'm not even using, such as swimming, education and the former of having a covenant relationship with Almighty God, all forever lies in His hands. That's new found confidence for me. Only believe and keep the faith!
- Dear Inner Reflection: This will be a short entry. I have a cold; I'm stressed; my body, mind and soul are tired and exhausted – in short, I'm weak... I have little energy.
- What stands out in this poem is there is joy and pain as well as sunshine and rain. It's all part of life. Again, our Creator is the author and sustainer of life (Romans 8:28). It all will work out together for the glory of God. Keep your eyes on Jesus.... Do not be discouraged – especially when you get weak. Jesus is your healer and your Savior!
- Dear Inner Soul: I'm making progress- still I'm weak. God sometimes have to slow us down and still our soul (Psalm 46:10). Be still.
- When I think about the "Resurrection of An Image" something must die. In Board of Examiners, one of the professors asked us, "What do you want God to do for you?" My response was to move self out of the way – my pain is self-dying and Jesus is increasing.

- As I think about finishing up my second year in seminary – Maters of Divinity as well as ordination, they are accomplishments, which frighten me – uncharted waters, but I’m blessed with the skill of swimming. I use to be a certified lifeguard. Remember [me] - Jesus is with you. You are never swimming alone. You will be fine! Your life is safe in His Matchless Hands! Praise the Lord! Bless His Holy Name.
- I’m grateful and thankful for [the researcher] writing such a heart-touching poem. Sometimes when we are going through the hard times in life, we cannot see what other people can see.
- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. still inspires me. Again, I have to speak out against injustice and inequalities. I know God is using me, like Dr. King. He too felt he was faltering, losing courage, afraid, and at the end of his patience. This is exactly how I am feeling – but I steady the cause – I’m armed and I’m ready by using prayer, reading and meditating on the Word of God. Surrounding myself by listening to spiritual songs. I will give thanks. I will praise the Lord – and I will keep moving in the Spirit – by dancing regardless [of] how much pain I am in – regardless of my struggles, because there is strength in the struggle – Phil 4:13 tells me so. “I can do all things through Christ whom strengthens me!” I believe, nothing can take my faith from me.
- I too have a dream – that racism will be no more – that we will love one another – that unity and harmony will be our common denominator for “life.” (Psalm 33:1).
- My desire is to maintain my covenant relationship with God.
- Resurrection of An Image – In order for a new image to surface –something old must have died. A part of self that was useless had to go. God has plans for my life. I want to live free and healthy.
- Got on my knees, tears cleansed my soul. I cried out to God.... As I move forward in this process...I would like to be clean inside and outside. The Spirit Dancer will continue to move in the spirit.
- As I read and re-read my poem, I’m tired of my restlessness, my sinfulness, and my brokenness; but as I look back over my life, God has kept me through it all. I am a “Spirit Dancer.” I will continue to praise Him and [for] any one around, I can only pray that they too will catch hold of God’s Spirit.
- I end this journal [entry] with Psalm 51 and Psalm 23 because I am love and I am bless[ed] by the best – God. I love You, God. I am grateful in being your daughter – hold me [as I] continue on th[is] turbulent journey.
- My desire after tonight’s reading is to be again active in my two wonderful grandchildren[’s lives].

- Good Morning World and so it is – good in spite of the challenging issues of this world. God is good and worthy to be praised! Let everything that hath “breath” praise the Lord! Thank You Lord for Your breath within me! Me a Spirit Dancer!
- The last page of my poem, the seventh line from the end, “For I realize I need to be totally covered by the Lord in order for me not to give up or succumb to the external, worldly pressures of spiritual warfare.” Another sleepless night in DC but this time I am holding on to my heart.... Right now, there is a piercing of my heart – give me strength to endure this intense moment. I am willingly accepting my affliction. I am led to play some inspirational music to dance through the pain.
- It is my desire to be close to God. There is safety in the Presence of God. I rebuke every wicked scheme of the evil one; you cannot have my life- I belong to God.
- After reading my poem – “my poem” – I say that with a smile and enjoying my image in the mirror. An ugly duckling I was called – nappy headed and being too dark. I give thanks for the image in the mirror – me (☺).
- My feelings after reading my poem, there has always been pain in my life. The way I see it, we come in the world in pain and before we leave this world, there will be pain. What I’m trying to say, pain is a process of being resurrected into the image “God” has intended for me.
- My poem “A Spirit Dancer Who Loves” has really touched my heart. I see this poem as an affirmation and confirmation of who I am. Again, I thank the Lord for ... a gifted, talented, and educated sista [the researcher].
- Today, what stands out in this poem [is] paragraph four: “the tensions, stressors, unresolved pain and grief from the past and very much in my present life today. To aid me on this pathway of pain, the author, Henri Nouwen, [in his book,] *Turn My Mourning into Dancing*, helps me to find hope in hard times. I quote from p. 37, “This is Jesus’ way. The man of sorrows, acquainted with grief (Isa 53:3), promised joy.... ‘You will weep and mourn; he said, ‘but your pain will turn into joy.’ (John 16:20). Joy is my desire. This poem gives me joy. Henri Nouwen’s book gives me joy. With all the racism that goes on at Wesley – I focus on Jesus and His joy for that is my purpose here – I’m on a mission for Jesus. There is [joy] in the midst of pain, grief, tension and stress. Thank You Lord!
- As I looked back over my life from reading my poem – God is awesome, powerful, and has been sooooo good to me. My nappy head is looking more [like that] of a beauty essence queen as I watch my locks grow. I can see an image being resurrected. I give thanks for all that has died within self. As far as racism, it will always be and in God’s time, we shall all be free as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. fought so hard for.
- In my heart, I have come to realize regardless [of] what goes on ... in my world; I will always be free in the Spirit to dance before my Lord.

Participant # 9 – LD – “A Physician Who Came to Love”

Initial

- Thank you. I find [the poem] like somebody talking to you, about you at your funeral. You really could have this as an obituary, as my obituary.
- I am standing outside myself, looking at myself and I am reminded of why I am here in the midst of the media, institution building and all else: I am here to love. And how does that manifest itself—through kindness, really listening, being patient, being the best that you can be.
- You have to love yourself first. I have to listen to myself, be patient with myself; I have to be within myself what I want for others.
- As I listened to the poem, I was observing the years going by. I went back to the church and felt the tapping of the feet and the rocking to the rhythms.
- Thank you, thank you for taking me back and for reminding me of who and why and what I am: a physician who has come to love.

Journal Reflections

- Who is this person?? I did not recognize this person. Why? The attributes of this person are far beyond what I think my current capacities are. I am intimidated by this person. This person came to love. This person is yoked into the universe, a deep feeler, who realizes and knows the power of love and God and speaks to worldly power. Am I really a patient, pretending to be a physician? Am I so sick that I am disillusioned with grandeur and ignored the physicians that have been sent into my life, the Robert Hooks, the Halie Gerima's, the Vantile Whitfield's? Do I still hear their voices loud and clear or, are they a faint echo that I never heeded?
- My history, my pain about my mother, that was very real, I can touch that, the church, the music. I cannot touch the power of God and speaking truth to worldly power, even if I attempt it or believe it, can I really touch it? On day one these were my questions.
- The Lineage, let's talk about the Lineage. If others have come before me and sacrificed a lot, their health, time, money even their lives for some of us to see the light, to see some possible equality, housing, economics, parity even, how do I advance the cause using the arts? Is it just enough to produce a play, a video a documentary, or is what I am really doing is reaching for connections with young people and my peers to understand content that can transform lives and the camera, the computer is just the vehicle? What are we here for if not to reach out and use what we think our mission is and make it better for someone else?
- So as I review New York, VA and now DC, [I realize] it was all a part of my development, my different families and different times of my life trying to show me, guide me to do the right thing. The right thing, that gives love and not pain.

My Lineage to my son, the youth of my community, my peers, my family is to give love and not pain, doing the right thing because I was told to do so, and I have institutional memory. The memory of whom I am truly, God's child, strength even in weak times, prosperous when I think I am broke, seeing and feeling enough to tell who ever will listen, it will be all right because we are going to make it that way with God as our co-partner. I affirm, I read, I affirm and strong men get stronger.

- The first day that I looked into the mirror as I read it. I am stepping outside of myself and listening to LD speak about his dreams and beliefs, his desires, and I know that if he stays on track he will make it happen for himself, his family, his community, his city, his country and his world. Why do I know that? Because of small victories, the divine gives us small victories, things turn out just as we plan them and, if not, we adjust until they do. This is the formula that runs throughout history for those who listen to their divine selves. I am listening through these pages and my belief is becoming a reality in early steps, early steps, become later steps and with later steps comes more confidence, more responsibility and larger victories. I thank you [researcher] for the victory today because I am fortified to meet the world today, to heal myself through healing. Today is a day of understanding the power of a physician.
- Now I understand, I now have all the answers to the questions of the moment, and the moment is the only thing that is real or important right now.

For a deep feeler I am,
 Passionate and loving of all that God has created, including both women
 and man.
 Groomed from the onset to see beginnings where others tend to see ends;
 Molded and shaped to proclaim and act on possibilities,
 No matter how bleak or pained is the perceived reality or current
 condition.
 For I came into the world with a definitive purpose, with a definitive
 mission: I came to Love

- This may have seemed the easy way out, it was the only way out. We have come full circle, I am truly a Physician who came to Love, and I thank you [researcher] for reminding me of whom I truly am. God Bless and Keep you and your family in his ever loving Grace.

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